PART I

Significance, History, People

Contents

1. Mental Aspects of a Pilgrimage [1]

1.1 Journey of Faith and Devotion

For the majority of Buddhists, going on a pilgrimage to the holy places mentioned by the Buddha, is a once-a-lifetime undertaking. With so much time, money and effort involved, it behooves the intending pilgrim to truly understand what a pilgrimage is all about, especially the mental aspect, since the physical part is normally taken care of by a travel company. **A pilgrimage is a journey to a sacred place as an act of faith and devotion**. In the scriptures, faith or *saddha* is the professing of confidence in and the sense of assurance based on understanding that one places on the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sangha*. It is not the blind belief based on wrong view. As ignorance is the leader of immoral mental states, so *saddha* is the leader of moral mental states because its chief characteristic is the **purification of the mind**.

Thus the pilgrim is no ordinary tourist who travels for the pleasure of sightseeing and enjoyment. Unlike sensual delights, the sight of the holy shrines do not arouse craving but act as a condition for wholesome mental states to arise in the pilgrim's mind. The Buddha himself advised us to visit those places where he was born, where he attained Enlightenment, where he preached the First Sermon and where he passed away into *Mahaparinibbana*, and look upon them with feelings of reverence. By showing veneration or reverence at the holy shrines, one is able to purify one's thought, speech and action. In this way, the pilgrim is endowed with the morality of Right Thought, Right Speech and Right Action. So we can see that visiting the places of pilgrimage with the correct mental attitude can help us in our practice of the Buddha's Teaching. According to the great commentator, **Ven. Buddhaghosa** the positive feeling resulting from seeing these sites is the religious excitement or the sense of urgency they produce. Another commentator, **Ven. Dhammapala**, explained that this sense of urgency means the mind possesses the knowledge that one should shrink from doing wrong, namely, the knowledge of morality.

1.2 Development of Perfections (*Paramis*)

The second aspect of a pilgrimage is that it is also **an act of renunciation** whereby the pilgrim does not crave for luxury but is contented with simple accommodation, food and transport. This non-greed state of mind enables one to endure any discomfort without complaint but with patience and loving-kindness. In the course of visiting the sacred places, **one feels that one is in the Master's presence** and this fullness of faith conduces to joy and the observance of morality, the foundation of all merit. Many pilgrims take the opportunity to bring with them requisites to perform *dana* out of reverence and gratitude to the *Sangha*, who take care of the holy places. The holy shrines are also conducive places for pilgrims to reflect on the Buddha's virtues and practise mindfulness to develop wisdom. These are various practices by which one can show veneration at the holy shrines or *cetiyas* in addition to the normal acts of devotion like the offering of flowers, lights, incense, and worship (*puja*). In the course of the pilgrimage, one can arouse many wholesome factors that cause one's volition to become superior and lead to the accumulation of superior wholesome *kamma.* Indeed, one can develop the Perfections (*Paramis*) and earn much merit when going on a pilgrimage. But it should not end when one has returned home. After the journey is over, one should always try to recollect the joyful moments spent at holy places to keep them vivid in one's memory. Such recollection is **productive of joy** and is a skilful means of re-enforcing one's good *kamma* already acquired. In times of sickness, fear and worry, or sorrow, one can easily dispel these negative mental states by rejoicing in one's wholesome actions during the pilgrimage.

1.3 Taking the Eight Precepts during Pilgrimage

Besides developing faith and performing charity, the pilgrimage is also a suitable time to practice the Buddha's Teaching by cultivating *sila* or morality. This is because morality is the foundation of all meritorious actions without which there can be no act of merit.

Thus many well-informed Buddhists undertake the **Eight Precepts** or *Uposatha Sila* to maintain purity of mind at the Four Holy Places of Pilgrimage, namely: Lumbini, Buddhagaya, Sarnath and Kusinara. However among the less-informed Buddhists, some may prefer to eat vegetarian meals throughout the journey, thinking that it is a form of precept taught by the Buddha to keep oneself pure (as some members are taught to believe by certain proponents of vegetarianism).

As the **Buddha did not advocate vegetarianism** for the *Sangha* and the laity, it is proper to explain that **keeping Eight Precepts** is far more superior than keeping a vegetarian diet as far as morality (*sila*) is concerned. Of course, some Buddhists may prefer to eat vegetarian food for health or other personal reasons. This is acceptable provided that they understand that it cannot replace the Eight Precepts where a **greater degree of restraint of the senses must be exercised**.

1.4 Buddhist Fellowship

Fellowship means a community of interests involving regular meetings, the sharing of responsibilities and good friendship for mutual support. This aspect of Buddhist fellowship is important in order to encourage and help one another in the practice of the Buddha's Teachings and to strengthen our faith in times of trial and tribulation. A pilgrimage in a group to the Four Holy Places is one of the best ways to cultivate Buddhist fellowship. Over the two weeks or so of the journey, members of the group will have the opportunity to interact closely and get to know each other well under conditions where *metta* (loving-kindness), *mudita* (appreciative joy), generosity and faith prevail. The bonds of comradeship formed through the **performance of meritorious actions together** will endure long after the pilgrimage is over and members will cherish fond memories of each other whenever they recollect the happy moments spent at the holy places. A journey to the Four Holy Places with fellow Buddhists united by faith and piety is true Buddhist fellowship and a wonderful way of forging friendship. Indeed, many pilgrims have undertaken the pilgrimage more than once after experiencing the **joys of such wholesome fellowship!**

1.5 Arousing Religious Urgency during Pilgrimage[2]

According to the Scriptures, the Four Holy Places of pilgrimage are called *Samvejaniya-thana*, or places that will **arouse awareness and apprehension** of the nature of impermanence. Thus skillful pilgrims take the opportunity of a pilgrimage to arouse religious urgency (*samvega*) by reflecting on the last words of the Buddha before he entered into *Parinibbana*: "Indeed, *bhikkhus*, I declare this to you: It is the nature of all conditioned things to perish. **Accomplish all your duties with mindfulness."**

The Four Holy Places were once great centres associated with the Buddha, *Dhamma* and famous *Arahant* disciples of the *Sangha*. One reads in the Pali scriptures about the glory of Buddha's Birth at Lumbini, his Enlightenment at Buddhagaya, the First Sermon at Isipatana, and his *Parinibbana* at Kusinara. Today the Buddha and the Great *Arahants* are no longer around, for even the Enlightened One and the Great *Arahants* have to succumb to sickness, old age and death. Thus **the world of living beings** (*satta-loka*) does not remain constant but is subject to change according to the Law of Impermanence. Reflecting on this one becomes truly apprehensive, and this arouses **religious urgency** (*samvega*) to practise the Noble Eightfold Path to realize Nibbana, the cessation of all suffering.

After Lord Buddha's *Parinibbana*, his devotees all over India built *stupas* and *viharas* to commemorate important events of the Buddha at these places. Thus we read about the 84,000 *stupas* built by King Asoka to honour the 84,000 Dhamma-khandas and monuments built by Buddhist kings of various dynasties to honour the Buddha. Today the pilgrim has to travel long distances over poor road conditions to remote areas in Northern India only to see the vestiges and ruins of these once glorious monuments that have been damaged or destroyed over time. Thus one becomes aware that the **conditioned world** (*sankhara*-loka) and **the natural world** (*okasa-loka*) do not remain constant but are subject to changes according to the Law of Impermanence. Reflecting on this one becomes truly apprehensive, and this arouses religious urgency to practise the Noble Eightfold Path to realize Nibbana, the cessation of all suffering.

2. Eight Great Places of Pilgrimage [3, 4]

In answer to Ven. Ananda's concern that the monks would no longer be able to see the Buddha and seek inspiration after His *Parinibbana,* Lord Buddha mentioned four places, which a pious disciple should visit and look upon with **feelings of reverence**. What are the four?

a. **Lumbini:** "Here the *Tathagata* was born! This, Ananda, is a place that a pious man should visit and look upon with feelings of reverence."
b. **Buddhagaya:** "Here the *Tathagata* became fully enlightened, in unsurpassed Supreme Enlightenment! This, Ananda, is a place that a pious man should visit and look upon with feelings of reverence."
c. **Sarnath:** "Here the *Tathagata* set rolling the unexcelled Wheel of the Law! This, Ananda, is a place that a pious man should visit and look upon with feelings of reverence."
d. **Kusinara:** "Here the *Tathagata* passed away into *Nibbana* wherein the elements of clinging do not arise! This, Ananda, is a place that a pious man should visit and look upon with feelings of reverence."

"*And whosoever, Ananda, should die on such a pilgrimage, with his heart established in faith, he at the breaking up of the body, after death, will be reborn in a realm of heavenly happiness*."

Mahaparinibbana Sutta

The four other sacred sites are the places sanctified by the Buddha and scenes of **four principal miracles** that He performed, namely:

e. **Savatthi,** where the Buddha performed the Twin Miracle to silence the heretics after which He ascended to Tavatimsa Heaven to preach to His mother.
f. **Sankasia,** where the Buddha descended from Tavatimsa Heaven accompanied by Brahma and Sakka, after preaching to His mother and the *Devas* for three months.
g. **Rajagaha,** where Buddha tamed the drunken elephant, Nalagiri.
h. **Vesali,** where a band of monkeys dug a pond for the Buddha's use and offered Him a bowl of honey.

Together, they make the Eight Great Places of Buddhist Pilgrimage. According to the *Buddhavamsa* Commentary, for all Buddhas there are four places that do not vary or are unalterable, namely:

- Seat of Enlightenment (*Bodhi pallanka*) at **Bodhgaya**,
- Turning of the wheel of *Dhamma* in Deer Park, **Sarnath**,
- Placing of the first footstep at the gate of the city of **Sankasia** at the Descent from Heaven,
- Placement of the four legs of the bed in the Perfumed Chamber (*Gandhakuti*) at Jetavana in **Savatthi.**

Note: The four unalterable places of all Buddhas are included in the Eight Great Places of Pilgrimage. Of the eight, seven are in India while the eighth, the Buddha's birthplace, Lumbini, is in Nepal. The names of some of the places mentioned in the Pali scriptures are no longer used in India. Their modern names are in parentheses: Buddhagaya (Bodhgaya), Kusinara (Kushinagar), Rajagaha (Rajgir), Savatthi (Sravasti) and Vesali (Vaishali).

2.1 Mental Attitude when Approaching the Holy Shrines

It is imperative for the pilgrim to realize that the principal purpose of the pilgrimage is to honour the Buddha. Therefore when approaching the holy shrines, one should show proper respect. The Buddha is the **King of *Dhamma*** (*Dhammaraja*) and one should approach the shrine as one would approach the presence of a king. Hence one should not engage in taking photographs excitedly, or look here and there treating the visit like a sightseeing tour or engage in frivolous talk but remain calm and serene in sense faculties. **One should walk mindfully**, head down and with palms clasped together in reverence maintaining noble silence or mentally reciting the virtues of the Buddha. As we enter the shrine, we should focus our mind as if we are entering the court of the *Dhammaraja*. Finally we should pay homage (*puja*) by taking refuge in the Triple Gem followed by Five or Eight Precepts and reciting the Virtues of the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sangha*. This is the proper way in which a pious disciple should visit the holy places and look upon them with **feelings of reverence**.

3. Famous Pilgrims of the Past [5, 6, 7]

The four sacred places and four places of miracles are known as *Atthamahathanani* or the Eight Great Places. **Emperor Asoka** called a visit to these eight shrines "***dhammayatra***" (*dhamma* expedition) or a pilgrimage of piety. On his twentieth regnal year in 249 BC, he heeded the exhortation of the Buddha and embarked on a holy pilgrimage visiting all these places. His pilgrimage was literally a 'landmark' journey because wherever he went he built *stupas* and raised pillars with inscriptions to commemorate his visit to these holy places. These towering monolithic pillars made of polished sandstone and topped with animal capitals have helped to identify the exact locations of the Buddhist world's most sacred places even after they fell into ruins following the downfall of Buddhism in India. Today after 2250 years, many of these Asokan pillars still stand proclaiming his faith and devotion. Modern day pilgrims can still see these pillars in **Lumbini, Vesali** and **Lauriya Nandangarh**, the famous Lion Capital at **Sarnath Museum** and the Elephant Capital at **Sankasia.** Thereafter succeeding Buddhist kings, queens, nobles and wealthy people followed King Asoka's example. As a result, India became studded with Buddhist monuments and shrines.

From China came the devout and earnest Buddhist monks, like **Fa Hsien**, **Hsüan Tsang** and many others, who travelled great distances braving immense hardships, perils, and even death to fulfill their desire to visit the holy places. In the **Kao-seng-chuan** (Chinese Monks in India by I-Ching), another pilgrim, **I-Ching**, described how he had to pass many days without food, even without a drop of water and wondered how the other travellers, under such difficult conditions, could keep up their morale and spirit. On the long, long trek, many died from sheer physical exhaustion or sickness and some had to leave their bones in desert-sands or somewhere out in India. Yet, in spite of these difficulties, they never faltered nor wavered, such was their **indomitable spirit** and desire to gaze on the sacred vestiges of their religion. Never did men endure greater suffering by desert, mountain and sea and exhibited such **courage, religious devotion** and **power of endurance**!

The pioneer among them was **Fa Hsien**. He took five years to walk from the Western border of China across the Taklamakan desert, one of the most hostile environments on this planet, and over the windswept passes of the Pamir and Hindu Kush mountain ranges to Northern India. After spending six years in India, he sailed to Sri Lanka, where he spent two more years. His homeward journey by sea took another year in which he stopped for five months in Java. Fa Hsien left an account of his journey of AD 399-414 in the **Fo-kwo-ki** (Record of the Buddhist Country). One hundred years after Fa Hsien, two monks, **Sung Yun** and **Hui Sheng** of Loyang (Honan-fu), were sent by the Empress of the Northern Wei dynasty to obtain Buddhist books from India. They started out in AD 518 and after reaching as far as Peshawar and Nagarahara (Jalalabad), returned to China in AD 521. Sung Yun left a short narrative of his travels but Hui Sheng did not record any detail of the journey.

Undoubtedly the most renowned Chinese pilgrim was the great *Tipitaka* master, **Hsüan Tsang**, who secretly set out on the long journey to the West in AD 629 at the age of twenty-seven. His travel in India was the most extensive, taking almost seventeen years (AD 629-645). When he returned to China, the T'ang Emperor T'ai Tsung bestowed upon him great ovation and public honour. Hsüan Tsang's record of his travels, known as **Si-yü-ki** (Record of the Western World), is a detailed and romantic account of the Buddhist shrines in India and other countries he passed through. His devotion, piety and love for learning became a source of inspiration to his contemporaries and later generation of pilgrims including **I-Ching**, who took the sea route to India and back. His travels covered the period AD 671-695 in which he spent ten years studying in Nalanda and another ten years in Sri-vijaya, Sumatra translating the scriptures. He wrote his account in the **Nan-hai**-ki-**kuei-nai-fa-chuan** (Record of the Inner Law sent home from the South Sea).

The records of the Chinese pilgrims are the only available writings describing the condition of Buddhism and the Buddhist sites as they existed at that time and have proven to be invaluable in locating their ruins during excavations in the 19th century by **Sir Alexander Cunningham** and others.

4. Record of the Buddhist Country by Fa Hsien[8]

Fa Hsien, whose original name was **Kung**, was born in Wu-Yang village in the district of Ping-Yang in **Shansi Province**. Because his three older brothers all died during childhood, his father had him entered as a Samanera at the age of three in the hope of saving his life, but still kept him at home. The child fell dangerously ill, and the father sent him to the monastery where he soon got well and refused to return to his parents. When he was ten, his father died. An uncle considering the loneliness of his mother, urged him to renounce the monastic life and return to her, but the boy replied: "I did not leave the family in compliance with my father's wishes, but because I wished to be far from the dust and vulgar ways of life. This is why I chose monkhood." The uncle approved of his words and gave up urging him. When his mother died, it appeared how great had been his affection for her but after her burial he returned to the monastery.

In AD 399, at the age of twenty-five, Fa Hsien travelled to India with some fellow monks, namely: **Hui-king**, **Tao-ching, Hui-ying, Hui-yu** and others, for the purpose of seeking the *Vinaya* or Monastic Rules. Starting from **Ch'ang-an** (Xian), they travelled by stages on foot till they reached **Chang-yeh**, a military station at the north-west extremity of the Great Wall, where they met another party of Chinese monks led by **Pao-yun** and **Sang-king**, also on their way to India. After spending the rainy season together in Chang-yeh, they pressed on to **Dunhuang** at the edge of the Taklamakan desert, where they stopped for over a month. The local prefect provided them with the necessities to cross the desert and Fa Hsien's party started out first on their long trek across the Taklamakan desert. Walking for seventeen days about 1500 li (1 li = 0.28 km) in a southwest direction, keeping to the edge of the desert, they reached the rugged and barren country of **Shen-shen** (Loulan), south of **Lop Nor**. The king of this country honoured the Buddhist religion and there were some 4000 monks, belonging to the Small Vehicle or *Hinayana* (**Note 1**).

After resting there for about a month, they travelled northwest for 15 days, probably following the course of the **Tarim** River, and arrived at the country of **Karashahr** near present-day **Korla**. There they met

again the party of monks led by **Pao-yun**, who had travelled by the northern route to **Hami** and **Turfan**. While Fa Hsien's group remained at Karashahr under the protection of an important official, Pao-yun's group was not so lucky and they had to return to Turfan to procure the necessaries for their journey. After staying in Kara-shahr for two months, Fa Hsien and his company continued their journey southwest across the desert. On the road, there were no dwellings or people. The sufferings of their journey on account of the difficulties of the road and rivers exceeded human comparison. They were on the road for a month and five days before they reached the prosperous, oasis town of **Khotan**. The ruler of the country provided them with accommodation in a monastery where they stayed for three months and were able to witness the grand procession of images, which began on the 4th month and lasted for fourteen days.

From Khotan, the pilgrims spent twenty-five days on the road to **Yarkand**, where they stopped for fifteen days before continuing their journey. After another twenty-five days of walking, they arrived at **Kie-sha** (**Kashgar**), in the middle of the **Tsung-ling** or Onion Mountains (**Note 2**), in time to witness the *Pancavassika Parisa* or Quinquennial assembly, a five-yearly event instituted by King Asoka, in which the ruler made a great offering to the *Sangha*. Leaving Kie-sha, they entered the great Pamir mountain range, taking a month to cross it, and keeping along the Tsung-ling, continued their journey southwest for fifteen days over a difficult, precipitous and dangerous road. Fa Hsien described it thus:

"*The mountainside is simply a stone wall standing up 10,000 feet. Looking down, the sight is confused and there is no sure foothold. Below is a river called* ***Sint'u-ho (Indus)****. In old days, men had cut away the rocks to make a way down and spread out side ladders, of which there are 700 steps to pass. When these are negotiated, the river is crossed by a hanging rope bridge. The two banks of the river are something less than 80 paces apart.*"

After crossing the river, they arrived at the country of **Udyana**, which comprises the regions from **Chitral** to **Swat Valley** in present day **North Pakistan**. It was then a flourishing centre of Buddhism, with five hundred monasteries belonging to the Small Vehicle. Three

of the pilgrims, Hui-king, Tao-ching and Hui Yu went on ahead to **Nagarahara** (Jalalabad) to pay reverence to the Buddha-shadow (**Note 3**) at the **Gopala Naga** cave and the tooth and skull bone relics at **Hadda** while Fa Hsien and Hui Ying remained at Udyana to spend the rains-retreat. When over, they journeyed south to **Swat** and descending eastward for five days arrived at **Gandhara** (region between Takkasila and Charsadda). From there, they travelled south to **Peshawar** to see the famed *stupa* of **Kaniska** and the alms-bowl relic (**Note 4**). Here they met the party of Pao-yun and Sang-king who had come to pay homage to the alms-bowl relic. One of Fa Hsien's friends, Hui-yu, who had previously gone to Nagarahara also came to Peshawar and at this point, he decided to return to China with Pao-yun and Sang-king. Meanwhile Fa Hsien's companion, Hui-ying, dwelling in the temple of the alms-bowl relic died there.

Fa Hsien now proceeded alone westward to Nagarahara. On the borders of the city of **Hadda** he visited the *vihara* of the Buddha's skull-bone. At the capital of **Nagarahara**, he visited the *viharas* of the Buddha's religious staff and *sanghati* (outer robe) and the Gopala Naga cave to pay homage to the Buddha shadow. He teamed up with his two remaining companions, Tao-ching and Hui-king and together they spent two months of winter there. When over, they proceeded south and encountered great difficulties and extreme cold crossing the **Safed Koh** mountain range. Hui-king, barely recovering from an earlier illness, was unable to proceed onwards. He died of exhaustion in Fa Hsien's arms, urging them to press on lest they too perished. With great effort, the surviving pilgrims crossed the mountain range and entered **Afghanistan** where they spent the rains-retreat in the company of 3000 monks in the vicinity.

When over, they crossed the **Punjab**, where they saw the Buddhist religion flourishing and after passing many monasteries with myraids of monks, the pilgrims reached **Mathura** country. Fa Hsien then visited in succession **Sankasia**, **Kanauj**, **Saketa** or **Ayodha** and **Savatthi**, where the monks at Jetavana monastery were astonished to see them for they had not seen men from Han (Chinese) come so far as this before in search of the Buddha's law. Moving eastward, they travelled to the ancient Sakyan kingdom, where they visited the birthplaces of **Kakusandha** Buddha and **Kanakagamana** Buddha

and saw the Asokan pillars erected there. The capital, **Kapilavatthu**, was like a great desert, without any inhabitant. There were only a congregation of monks and about ten families of lay people. The roads were devoid of travellers for fear of wild elephants and lions.

From Kapilavatthu, the pilgrims travelled to **Kusinara**, scene of the Buddha's *Mahaparinibbana.* In this city too, there were few inhabitants and such families as were there, were connected with the congregation of monks. Moving onwards, they went to **Vesali** and **Pataliputta**, the capital of ancient **Magadha**. From there, they moved on to **Nalanda** and **Rajagaha**, where Fa Hsien ascended **Gijjhakuta** hill and after offering flowers, incense and lights, remained there the whole night contemplating and reciting the suttas. Continuing the pilgrimage, they went to **Buddhagaya**, scene of the Buddha's Enlightenment, Deer Park at **Sarnath** where the Buddha preached the First Sermon, **Varanasi** and lastly **Kosambi** in Allahabad district, where they visited the ruins of **Ghositarama** monastery. Returning to Pataliputta, **Tao-ching** decided to take up permanent residence in India after seeing the strict decorum observed by the monks in India with regard to the Disciplinary rules compared with the meagre character of the precepts known in China.

For Fa Hsien, the purpose of his sojourn was to seek copies of the Monastic Rules to take home but throughout the journey, he was unable to obtain a single copy as the rules were transmitted orally. Here he was able to obtain a copy used by the Mahasanghikas at Jetavana monastery. Fa Hsien spent three years learning Sanskrit and copying out the Rules. Then following the course of the Ganges river in an easterly direction, he travelled to **Tamralipti** (modern Tamluk in West Bengal), where he spent a further two years copying the sacred texts and drawing image pictures. From the port of Tamralipti, he took a ship to **Sri Lanka** where he spent two more years collecting and copying the Buddhist texts including the **Mahisasaka** monastic rules, unknown in China.

Fa Hsien had been away from his homeland for many years. Of the four monks who accompanied him to India, one returned to China after going only as far as Peshawar, two died in India and one remained behind in India. At the **Abhayagiri** monastery in

Anuradhapura, the sight of a merchant making a religious offering of a white silk fan from China made him feel sad and homesick. Having completed his original purpose of obtaining the knowledge of the precepts to spread throughout the land of Han, he decided to return home. In his voyage home by sea in 412 AD, he had several miraculous escapes. His ship sprung a leak during a violent storm and was driven to the island of **Yepoti** (Java), then the center of Hindu rule, where he found a Brahmin society there but no Chinese and very few Buddhists.

After spending five months at Yepoti, Fa Hsien took another boat bound for **Canton** but after a month and some days, he encountered another storm. The crew and passengers were terrified and all the Brahmins on board blamed the Shraman (monk) Fa Hsien for the bad luck and threatened to maroon him on the first island they landed. Luckily his *dayaka* (religious patron) was on board to prevent them from carryiong out their threat. After seventy days at sea with no sight of land, the crew realized that the ship was off-course and decided to set a northwest direction to look for land. After twelve days continuous sailing, they arrived at the southern coast of Lau-shan near the prefecture of Chang-Kwang. Meeting with two locals, they finally realized that they had landed at **Tsing-Chow**, on the shores of the **Shantung Peninsula** instead. Yet in spite of all the perils of the sea, Fa Hsien had managed to return home safely with his precious cargo of the sacred texts intact.

After resting at **Tsing-Chow** for the summer, he proceeded to **Nanking** where he exhibited the sacred books he had brought back. He was away fourteen years and had encountered great hardships and dangers in his travels through nearly thirty different countries. Having been protected by the power of the Triple Gem and delivered safely from all dangers, he desired to share his experiences with readers by writing these records of his travels from AD 399-414. At Nanking, he executed translations of some of the works which he had obtained in India with the assistance of **Buddhabhadra**, an Indian Sramana. He died at the age of eighty-eight in the monastery of Sin in Tsing-Chow after having accomplished his mission of translating into Chinese the Buddhist texts, which he had taken so much time and trouble to bring back from India.

5. Record of the Western World by Hsüan Tsang[8]

The 'T'ang Dynasty Record of the Western World' is an objective record composed in twelve books by the famous Chinese pilgrim **Hsüan Tsang** about his epic journey from China to Central Asia and the Indian Sub-Continent and back in AD 629-645. It should not be confused with the popular Chinese fiction Si-yu-ki or Travels to the West featuring the adventures of the mythical Monkey God, which have been made into films and TV shows for entertainment.

While Fa Hsien went to India to seek the *Vinaya* or Monastic Rules, Hsüan Tsang's purpose of going to India was to learn from the wise men there on the points of doctrine that were troubling his mind. When his application to leave China was refused by the authorities, he departed in secret from **Chang'an** (Xian) in AD 629 at the age of twenty-seven. Heading up the **Gansu** corridor, he passed **Lanzhou** and worked his way to the end of the Great Wall near **Dunhuang**. There he took the northern branch of the Silk route passing through **Yumen Guan** (Jade Gate Pass) and after crossing the **Gobi** desert, arrived at **Hami**. There, he was summoned to **Turfan**, the capital of the **Uighur** country, by its pious Buddhist ruler to become the country's chief priest, an offer Hsüan Tsang declined. After failing in his attempt to detain Hsüan Tsang, he remitted the pilgrim to **Kara-shahr**, from which the latter advanced to **Kucha**.

Kucha was an oasis town on the edge of the desert, famous for its excellent horses. The ground was rich in minerals and its soil was suitable for agriculture. It had one hundred monasteries with over five thousand **Sarvastivadin** monks. All the monasteries had highly adorned images of the Buddha, which were paraded on special occasions in a procession of idol-carriages. In Kucha, the king observed the Quinquennial Assembly, originally instituted by King Asoka, whereby a great offering was made to the *Sangha* every five years. Outside the main city gate, Hsüan Tsang saw two erect figures of the Buddha, about 90 feet tall, and in front of them was a place erected specially for this festival. After staying here for two months, he continued his journey to **Aksu** and crossing the snowy **Tian Shan**

mountains, reached the shores of **Lake Issyk Kul** in **Kyrgyzstan**. This mountain lake, 5200 feet above sea level, is the second largest in the world covering an area of 6200 sq. km.

He then proceeded northwest along the fertile valley of the **Chu river** passing the Kyrgyz lake-land area of **Myn-bulak**, known as the "Thousand springs". Moving westward, he passed the Tartar town of **Taras** and the country of **Nujkend** on the **Chatkal range**, and arrived at **Tashkent** in **Eastern Uzbekistan**, which was then under the control of the Tuh-kiueh (Huns or Eastern Turks). The next stop was **Samarkand**, a very populous country located at the junction of the trade routes between China and India. It was the emporium of the Silk route where the merchants bartered their goods, and according to Hsüan Tsang, "*The precious merchandise of many countries is stored up here. Its inhabitants are skilful in the arts and trades beyond those of other countries. The people are brave and energetic and are copied by all surrounding people in point of politeness and propriety.*"

From Samarkand, the pilgrim proceeded to **Kesh** (Karshi) and moving south entered the mountains. After traveling about 90 miles up a steep and precipitous road, he arrived at the **Iron Gate** (Derbent in Uzbekistan), a mountain pass bordered on both sides by very high rocky walls with an iron colour. Here double wooden doors had been erected and many bells were fixed on them. The doors were strengthened with iron and impregnable. Because of the protection afforded to the pass when these doors were closed, the pass was called Iron Gate. Passing Iron Gate, he reached **Tukhara**, a country controlled by the Turks and crossing the **Oxus** river (Amu Darya) near **Termez**, arrived at **Kunduz** in Afghanistan. Here he met the eldest son of the Turkish Khan, brother-in-law of the king of Turfan, from whom Hsüan Tsang had letters of recommendation. After some delay, he proceeded with some monks from **Balkh** to that city, formerly capital of the Bactrian kingdom of **Milinda**. It had about a hundred monasteries and three thousand monks.

After paying reverence to the sacred relics, he departed from Balkh and made the difficult and dangerous journey across the **Hindu Kush** mountain range to **Bamiyan**. Here the people worshipped the

Triple Gem but still maintained a hundred tutelary deities, whom the merchants sought to propitiate when business was bad. There were ten monasteries with about a thousand monks of the Lokuttaravadin School. Hsüan Tsang saw the colossal **Bamiyan Buddha** images, about 55 and 35 metres tall, carved out of a mountain-side in the 4^{th}–5^{th} centuries AD, and mistook the smaller one to be bronze due to its gilded surface. He also saw a large reclining Buddha image and paid reverence to some tooth relics. (In an act of religious bigotry, the fanatical **Talibans of Afghanistan** destroyed these ancient Buddha images in 2001, despite worldwide protests and condemnations.)

Moving eastward, Hsüan Tsang entered the passes of the Hindu Kush and crossing the **Siah Koh** ridge, arrived at the country of **Kapisa**. It had one about hundred monasteries with six thousand Mahayana monks and a great monastery with three hundred monks of the Small Vehicle. There were also some ten *Deva* temples with about a thousand Hindu ascetics of various sects, such as naked ascetics (*Digambaras*), those who covered their bodies with ashes (*Pasupatas*) and those who wore chaplets of bones on their heads (*Kapaladharinas*). Every year, the king would make a silver image of the Buddha and offer alms to the poor, destitute and bereaved in his kingdom. After spending the summer of AD 630 in Kapisa, Hsüan Tsang went to **Nagarahara** (Jalalabad). Here he found many monasteries but few monks. The *stupas* were desolate and ruined. He visited the famous **Naga Gopala** cave, which according to legend, once contained the shadow left by the Buddha after he had tamed the *naga* (serpent). At the *vihara* of the skull-bone relic, he found that the caretakers were Brahmans appointed by the king and they charged the worshippers a fee in order to see the relic.

From Nagarahara, the pilgrim entered **Gandhara** by the **Khyber Pass**. Here he found the towns and villages deserted with few inhabitants. There were about a thousand monasteries, which were in ruins, overgrown with wild shrubs and empty. The *stupas* were mostly decayed. At the capital, **Purushapura** (Peshawar), there was only one monastery with fifty Mahayana monks. However, the ***Deva*** temples numbering about one hundred were fully occupied with heretics.

According to Hsüan Tsang, "*Centuries ago, there was a treacherous Hun king from Sakala named **Mihirakula,** who killed his benefactor, the king of Kashmir and usurped the throne. Then he came to Gandhara and killed its ruler in an ambush. He exterminated the royal family and chief minister, overthrew the stupas and destroyed the monasteries, altogether one thousand six hundred foundations*."

Travelling north, the pilgrim arrived at **Udyana**, a flourishing centre of Buddhism during the time of Fa Hsien. But now, all its one thousand four hundred olden monasteries lay waste and desolate. Formerly, there were some eighteen thousand monks but now there were very few. After visiting the shrines, he continued his journey to **Takkasila** (near Rawalpindi). Here again, he saw the aftermath of the devastation by the Hun king Mihirakula — many monasteries destroyed and deserted. From Takkasila, he went to **Kashmir** where Buddhism still prevailed. There were still a hundred monasteries and five thousand monks. It appeared that after the death of Mihirakula, his descendants, who then ruled Kashmir, atoned for his misdeeds by erecting *stupas* and monasteries for the Buddhists. At the capital **Srinagar**, Hsüan Tsang spent two years (AD 631-633) studying philosophy and copying the scriptures under a Mahayanist teacher.

From Kashmir, the pilgrim travelled south passing **Jammu** and reached **Sakala** (Sialkot near Lahore), the seat of the Bactrian king Milinda of old and of the infamous Mihirakula of late. As he was leaving Sakala, he was robbed by brigands and spent the night in a neighbouring village. Moving on, he reached a large town, probably **Lahore**, where he remained for a month. Then he went to stay a year in **Chinapati.** In AD 634, he travelled to **Jalandhar** and reaching the **Sutlej** river, passed **Satadru** and **Paryartra** before arriving at **Mathura**. Along the way, he could see the decline of Buddhism and the rise of neo-Brahmanism of the Gupta age. Mathura, a stronghold of Buddhism during the time of King Asoka and centre of the Sarvastavadin school under the famous monk **Upagupta**, was now a shadow of its past, with only twenty monasteries and two thousand monks. After visiting the local shrines, the pilgrim ascended the **Yamuna** River to **Kuru-kshetra (**Thaneswar), the holy land of the Hindus and scene of the legendary Mahabharata wars between the Pandava brothers and the Kauravas, cousins as well as bitter rivals.

There were only three monasteries with about seven hundred monks but one hundred *Deva* temples with great numbers of various sectarians.

Travelling east, he reached the Ganges and following its downward course, passed several towns where he noted the rising tide of Brahmanism. He visited **Sankasia** and saw the shrines associated with the Buddha's descent from Heaven. Next he went to **Kanauj** also known as Kanyakubja, i.e., "city of the hump-backed women", which King **Harsha Vardhana** had made his capital. He did not meet the king who was away, but who later became his friend and patron. From Kanauj, he went to **Ayodha** or **Saketa**, where the Mahayanist teacher **Vasubhandu** composed his *sastras* or treatises and reaching the confluence of the Ganges and Yamuna rivers, arrived at **Prayag** (Allahabad). There were two monasteries with few followers but many *Deva* temples with great numbers of sectarians. At the confluence of the two rivers, Hsüan Tsang saw hundreds of Hindu devotees drowning themselves in the waters after fasting for seven days, in the belief that this would wash away their sins and lead them to heaven. He went to **Kosambi** and visited **Ghositarama**, now an old habitation in ruins, which the rich merchant Ghosita had built for the Buddha to stay whenever he was in Kosambi.

Moving northwards, the pilgrim travelled to **Sravasti** and visited **Maheth**, where he saw the Sudatta *stupa* marking the site of Anathapindika's house and beside it the Angulimala *stupa*. At **Saheth**, he found **Jetavana** in ruins and deserted. From Sravasti, he went to **Kapilavastu**, capital of the old Sakyan kingdom; **Lumbini**, birthplace of the Buddha; **Ramagama**, which had been waste and desolate for many years; and **Kusinara**, scene of the Buddha's *Mahaparinibbana*. Travelling south 500 li, through a great forest, he reached **Varanasi**, the sacred city of the Hindus. There were about thirty monasteries with three thousand monks but over a hundred *Deva* temples with about ten thousand sectarians, mostly **Siva** worshippers. At the Deer Park in **Sarnath**, he visited a monastery with fifteen hundred monks of the Sammitiya School and paid reverence at the shrines in the vicinity. Following the course of the Ganges eastward to **Ghazipur**, then northeast, he arrived at the city of **Vesali**. There were several hundred monasteries, which were

mostly dilapidated with very few monks. The city was in ruins and practically deserted. He saw the Asokan pillar with a lion capital on top and beside it, the *stupa* built by King Asoka. Near the pillar was a pond dug by a band of monkeys for the Buddha's use and further south was a *stupa* marking the spot where the monkeys, taking the Buddha's bowl, climbed a tree and gathered him some honey. Travelling northwest, he passed the **Vajjian** country and went to **Nepal**. Then returning to **Vesali** and crossing the Ganges, he arrived at the country of **Magadha**.

Pataliputta (Patna), capital of the great Mauryan Empire during the time of King Asoka, was in decay. There were fifty monasteries with about ten thousand monks, the majority being Mahayanists. In the old city, Hsüan Tsang saw hundreds of monasteries, *Deva* temples and *stupas* lying in ruins. He also visited **Kukkutarama** monastery built by Asoka, but the building had long been in ruins and only the foundation walls remained. Travelling south, he passed the Tiladaka *vihara* where learned men and scholars from different countries came to study. Inside one building, he saw images of Avalokitesvara and Tara beside a standing image of the Buddha, an indication of the growing influence of **Tantrism**. Moving on he reached the Neranjara river and crossing it, arrived at **Gaya**. Here he visited **Pragbodhi** (Dungeswari) where the *Bodhisatta* underwent six years' austerities, **Sujata's** village, **Uruvela** forest and **Bodhgaya**, scene of Buddha's Enlightenment and holiest spot to all Buddhists. Then he went to **Rajagaha** where he visited all the sacred shrines, including Vulture Peak, Bamboo Grove, the hot springs, Pippala stone house and Sattapanni caves, venue of the First Buddhist Council.

He was in Nalanda around AD 635 and enrolled at the famous **Nalanda University**, India's premier Buddhist seat of learning, to fulfill his purpose of coming to India and learn from the wise men about Buddhism. Admission was based on merit in which the gate-keeper, a responsible officer of considerable learning, would ask some difficult questions and the candidate had to answer them to his satisfaction. Normally, out of ten candidates, seven or eight would fail this screening test. Hsüan Tsang, who already had a solid grounding of scholarship, was able to gain admission into the University. Here he studied **Yogacara** philosophy under the famous

Mahayanist teacher **Silabhadra.** He also studied Hindu philosophy and mastered the Sanskrit language. During his residence in Nalanda, he distinguished himself by his diligence and scholarship.

In AD 638, he interrupted his studies and travelled to **Champa** (Bhagalpur) and **West Bengal**, ending up at **Tamralipti,** where he intended to take ship to **Sri Lanka** and study the Theravada doctrine. There he was told that the island was within easy reach of South India. So he decided to travel by land rather than take the risk of a long sea voyage. Moving in a southwesterly direction, he passed **Orissa** state, which had some hundred monasteries with ten thousand Mahayanist monks, and **Kalinga** where the heretics, mostly *Niganthas* predominated. Then continuing the journey through **Kosala** (the land of **Nagarjuna**, founder of the Madhyamika doctrine) and **Andhra,** he reached **Amaravati**. There were numerous monasteries but they were deserted and ruined. Of those preserved, there were about twenty with a thousand monks of the Mahayana tradition. He saw two establishments situated on two cliffs, one in the east called **Purvasaila** (East cliff), and the other on the west called **Aparasaila** (West cliff). Both used to be inhabited by monks but were now deserted and wild. After spending the rainy season of AD 639 in Amaravati, the pilgrim proceeded south passing the country of **Chola,** which he described as "*wild and deserted, a succession of marshes and jungle, with a small population and troops of brigands go through the country openly*". Then continuing south through a wild forest district and travelling 1500 li, he arrived at the country of **Dravida**.

At the capital **Kanchipuram** (near Madras), there were about a hundred monasteries with ten thousand Mahayanist monks. Here he learned that **Sri Lanka** was facing unrest and famine following the death of its ruler. So he gave up the idea of going to the island. Moving northwards, he entered a forest and passed many deserted villages where brigands roamed in search of victims. After travelling 2000 li without incident, the pilgrim arrived at **Konkanapura** (Golconda near Hyderabad), which had about a hundred monasteries with ten thousand monks from both traditions. From Konkanapura, he crossed a wild country, infested with wild beasts and robbers, and arrived safely in the state of **Maharashtra**, where he visited the

famous rock-cut cave monasteries or *lenas* at **Ajanta.** From Ajanta, he travelled to **Valabhi** around AD 641 passing **Bharoch**, **Malava** and **Kachha**. Valabhi was the capital of the **Maitraka** kingdom in **Gujerat** and a famous centre of learning and commerce. According to Hsüan Tsang, "*There were about a hundred families who possess a hundred lakhs (millionaires). The rare and valuable products of some distant regions are stored here in great quantities*."

He visited a great monastery where two distinguished Mahayana Masters, **Sthiramati** and **Gunamati** had resided and composed their treatises. Moving west, he passed **Surashtra** and **Gurjjara** before arriving at **Ujjain**, the capital of **Avanti**. There were scores of monasteries but they were mostly in ruins and only three hundred monks remained. Moving west, he travelled to **Sindh** where he saw several hundred monasteries occupied by some ten thousand monks of the Sammatiya School. Then moving north and crossing the Indus, he arrived at **Multan**. Here the believers and monks were few. There were ten monasteries, all in ruins. At this point, he decided to return to **Nalanda** as he had visited most of the Buddhist shrines in India.

Back at Nalanda, Hsüan Tsang devoted his time fully to the study of the Mahayana doctrines and participated in philosophical debates. After acquiring an encyclopedic learning, he was looking forward to return to China and spread the new learning. The king of Assam, **Kumara-raja**, heard about the Chinese master's ability and invited him to the capital **Kamarupa** in AD 643. While Hsüan Tsang was there, Kumara-raja received an order from his overlord, King **Harsha Vardhana,** to bring the Chinese monk to see him at Kajinghara, a small kingdom on the banks of the Ganges. At the meeting, both men established a close relationship. Harsha Vardhana invited Hsüan Tsang to his capital at **Kanauj** where he convoked a religious assembly on the banks of the Ganges, attended by the kings of twenty vassal states, together with monks and Brahmans. Hsüan Tsang was appointed 'Lord of the Discussion'. For the next three weeks, Harsha would offer food to the monks and Brahmans daily. After this, he would carry a life-size golden image of the Buddha on his shoulder up a tall tower, where he paid homage to the Triple Gem with a great offering of silken garments decorated with precious stones. On the last day, the heretics tried to sabotage the assembly by

setting fire to the tower and attempting to assassinate the king in the resulting confusion. But the attempt on Harsha's life was foiled when the king himself arrested the culprit. He confessed that the heretics and Brahmans, jealous of the reverence and honour accorded to the Buddhist monks by the king, hired him. Thereupon the king punished the ringleader and banished the Brahmans to the frontiers of India. After this, Harsha took his honoured guest to **Prayag**, where he held the Quinquennial festival in which he gave away all his wealth accumulated over five years, following the example of King Asoka.

After witnessing the ceremonies at Prayag, Hsüan Tsang stayed for ten more days with Harsha and then started his return journey to China. To ensure his safe passage to the border, Harsha provided him with a military escort led by **Kumara-raja**. He returned to China by the opposite direction in which he came to India, by way of **Jalandhar**, **Takkasila** and **Nagarahara**. Then crossing the **Hindu Kush**, he entered northern Afghanistan. Moving in a northwest direction, he reached **Badakshan** and traversing the mountains and valleys of the **Pamirs**, passed several towns in **Tajikistan.** Then crossing the **Sarykol** range, which forms the border between China and Tajikistan, he reached **Kashgar** in Xinjiang province. From Kashgar, he travelled to **Yarkand** and **Khotan**, and crossing the **Takla Makan** desert, arrived at **Dunhuang**. After resting for some time at Dunhuang, he returned to **Chang'an** (Xian) in AD 645. There the officials and monks him received with great honour. He appeared before the Emperor a few days later to pay his respects. He had brought back with him the following articles:

1. One hundred and fifteen grains of Buddha relics.
2. Six statues of the Buddha.
3. One hundred and twenty four Mahayana works or sutras.
4. Other scriptures amounting to six hundred and fifty seven works, carried by twenty-two horses.

Hsüan Tsang spent the remainder of his life translating the Sanskrit works brought back by him with the aid of a team of translators. He died in AD 664 at the age of sixty-two, after fulfilling his mission of learning from the wise men in India about Buddhism and bringing back the knowledge to China.

For a copy of the route taken by Hsüan Tsang, please refer to the 'Map of Hsuan Tsang's Jorurney To India' in PDF format.

6. Decline and Downfall of Buddhism in India [5, 9, 10, 11, 12]

Buddhism in India suffered two extensive devastations in its history. The first was by the **Hephthalites** or White Huns (**Note 5**), who invaded India in 470-480 AD and conquered the border provinces of Gandhara and Kashmir. The Hun king, **Mihirakula** was a barbarian and a sworn enemy of Buddhism, bent on destroying the Buddhist establishment. Their conquest was accomplished with great ferocity and the Gupta regime was completely extinguished. It was not until 533 AD that Mihirakula was subjugated by **Yasodharman** of Mandasor. Hsüan Tsang who passed through Gandhara and Kashmir one hundred years later heard about the devastation and reported that in Gandhara alone, "*Mihirakula overthrew stupas and destroyed monasteries, altogether one thousand and six hundred foundations*."

According to **M. Ashraf Khan** (**Ref. 45, page 6**) the local Brahmins had been dissatisfied of being deprived of royal patronage from successive Buddhist kings since Asoka's time. So they colluded with the Hephthalites during their invasion of **Gandhara** in about 470 AD leading to the slaughter of Buddhists and plundering and destruction of Buddhist monasteries as reported by Chinese pilgrims later.

At that age, Buddhism had enough vitality to heal the wounds inflicted by the Huns for over a decade. *Sangha* life picked up again in new monasteries built over the ruins of the demolished ones. However, in the western part of India, namely: Gandhara, Kashmir and western Uttar Pradesh, Buddhism had lost much ground to the neo-Brahmanism of the Gupta age. In the eastern part, in Magadha (Bihar) and West Bengal, it began to revive again under the Buddhist king, **Harsa Vardhana** (7^{th} century AD) and later on, under the patronage of the **Pala kings** (8^{th}-12^{th} century AD).

This was a period when the *viharas* underwent transformation from being monastic training centres to larger institutions or ***Mahaviharas*** dedicated to learning and scholarship. These *Mahaviharas* such as **Nalanda, Odantapuri** and **Vikramasila** in Magadha had as many as 10,000 students from every Buddhist country. Kings, nobles, wealthy

merchants and ordinary people all contributed their share towards the maintenance of these famous universities, but although their financial support made these Buddhist institutions famous and prosperous, yet they undermined the high ideals of renunciation and simple lifestyle upon which the *Sangha* was founded. Philosophical speculations and logic in the Mahayana tradition to counter the realistic Nyaya position propounded by the Brahmin scholars of Mithila was the chief activity of these Mahayana centres. The logical controversy between Nalanda and Mithila dragged on for hundreds of years, from the 5th to 12th centuries AD.

So the monks slowly became accustomed to an easy life devoted to academic pursuits and religious rituals and relaxed their moral code to accommodate worldly practices and beliefs. According to **I-Ching** who studied in Nalanada from 675-85 AD, "*the venerable and learned priests of Nalanda monastery ride in sedan-chairs when they travel. The necessary baggage are carried by their attendants; such are the customs among the Bhikshus in India*". (Ref. 7, page 30)

I-Ching also noticed a tendency among monasteries in India to hoarding, which prompted him to add this censorious note: "*It is unseemly for a monastery to have great wealth, granaries full of rotten corn, many servants, male and female, money and treasures hoarded in the treasury, without using any of these things, while all the members are suffering from poverty. The wise should always act according to the proper judgement of what is right or wrong.*" (Ref. 7: page 194)

Such easy lifestyles and wealth contributed to the disintegration of the Order into diverse sects, to a weakening of morality and corresponding erosion of the laity's faith in the *Sangha.*

Earlier in the Gupta period (c. AD 300-550), the **Mahayana** doctrine had reached the stage whereby *Arahantship* was openly condemned and *Bodhisattaship* held up as the goal towards which every good Buddhist should aim for. According to the Pali scholar **Rhys Davids** in his book "The History and Literature of Buddhism", the whole exposition of this theory was set in the **Lotus Sutra** or the *Saddharma Pundarika* as it is called in Sanskrit. It was so subversive

of the original Buddhism and even claimed to have been preached by the Buddha himself. With the passage of time, more philosophical speculations in the Mahayana tradition emerged and led to the worship of various Mahayanist gods and "*Bodhisattas*" conceived to symbolize the philosophical speculations. According to Rhys Davids, as time went on, converts to the Mahayana who were well acquainted with the Hindu deities of the day, conveniently adopted many Hindu deities into the Buddhist pantheon. These Hindu deities were represented as "*Bodhisattas*" in order to bring about reconciliation between the two faiths and to attract more devotees. To convince the naive devotees that it was indeed a Buddhist deity, each icon had a small Buddha image on its head.

Grand temples were built in honour of these new "*Bodhisattas*", in which elaborate ceremonies were performed, which attracted people from all walks of life and encouraged different superstitious beliefs and modes of worship. These practices formed the basis for the development of **Tantrayana** by Buddhists who adopted the methods of Hindu Tantrists by incorporating Vedic and Hindu beliefs into the religion (refer to Indian Buddhism by Hajime Nakamura).

During the later part of the Pala period (9^{th} to 11^{th} century AD), Buddhism became heavily **adulterated by the Tantric cult**, with its magic spells, yoga and practices that were completely alien to the earlier form of Buddhism. The religion was now reduced into an **esoteric yogic system** with emphasis in the efficacy of magic spells and *mantras* and practice of *mudras* (physical postures), *mandalas* (mystical diagrams), *kriyas* (rites), etc. Tantric mystics were accepted as great leaders who claimed to have discovered the shortest route to Deliverance. In some quarters, it was believed that the "grace of the teacher" was sufficient for the realization of the Sublime. The highly symbolic language of esoteric Tantric writers encouraged some of these gurus to ridicule the monastic code and even propagate mass indulgence in wine and women as a way to attain the highest knowledge. The discovery in the ruins of Nalanda of several Tantric images, all of which belonged to the Pala period of its history, provides evidence of the development of Tantrayana at Nalanda University.

According to **Ven. Jagdish Kashyap**[9], the religion had become so polluted and weakened by these perverted forms of practice that it became practically impossible to revive after the destruction of the Mahayana temples and monasteries by the Muslim invaders.

The Fatal Blow

The **Turuskas** or **Khaliji Turks** (**Note 6**) from Afghanistan dealt the fatal blow to Buddhism in India at the close of the 12th century AD. They were fanatical Muslims, bent on conquest and destruction. By then, they had conquered the western part of Uttar Pradesh called the **Doab**, the region bordered by the Yamuna and the Ganges rivers, where they had settled themselves with expansionist aims. Soon they began their invasion, spreading terror and panic through all the towns and countryside in their path, and their advance posed a tremendous threat to all monasteries and temples of northern India. The whole doomed area in the east, ancient Magadha (Bihar) and North Bengal, fell to the marauders. Especial ferocity was directed towards Buddhist institutions with huge Buddha and "*Bodhisatta*" images, which were systematically plundered, destroyed or vandalised. The shaven-headed monks wearing distinctive monastic robes were easily spotted and massacred wholesale as idolaters! (**Note:** Since the usual Muslim word for what they understand to be an 'idol' (*budd*) is in fact borrowed from the Sanskrit '*buddha*', one can imagine that these '*buddha*-smashers' on their fanatical campaigns took particular care to seek out and destroy Buddhist institutions.)

In the beginning of the thirteenth century, the structures of the **Vikramalasila** *Mahavihara* (probably sited near Colgong, District Bhagalpur, Bihar) were razed to the ground by the invaders, who out of wrath were said to have uprooted even the foundations and threw them into the Ganges. The same fate was met about this time by the **Odantapuri** *Mahavihara* (sited at Bihar Sharif near Nalanda), which had been turned into a garrison of Muslim soldiers, who in about 1198 AD under **Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khaliji** committed such a savage massacre of the Buddhist *bhikkhus* of the *Mahavihara* that not a single human being was around to acquaint the killers of the

contents of books stored in the library! The story of this assault was told long afterwards, in 1243 by a eye-witness to the Persian historian Minhaz. In his book, Tabaquat-i-Nasiri, he reported as follows (Ref. Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India, page 357):

"*Most of the inhabitants of the place were Brahmanas with shaven heads (monks). They were put to death. Large numbers of books were found there, and when the Mahammadans saw them, they called for some person to explain the contents. But all of the men were killed. It was discovered that the whole fort and city was a place for study (madrasa): in the Hindi language the word **Bihar** (i.e. Vihara) means a **college**.*"

In the destruction of the University of Nalanda, the same historian recorded that thousands of monks were burned alive and yet more thousands beheaded, and the burning of the library continued for several months. **Such was the savagery of the Muslim invaders!**

The Last Days of Nalanda Mahavihara

At that period of history, Buddhism had evolved into a philosophical and academic tradition and the heart of its tradition lay in the universities rather than among the masses of the people. When the Muslims destroyed the great universities of Magadha and exterminated the monks, **they literally destroyed its physical heart**. Yet a lingering pulse of life still continued. For some time a few brave monks still hung on near the ruined universities. As reported by a Tibetan pilgrim named **Dharmaswamin** four decades later in 1235AD, somewhere in the vast deserted ruins of Nalanda University, an old nonogenarian monk named **Rahula Sribhadra** had made his dwelling and was still teaching Sanskrit grammar to seventy students. He was in the last stage of poverty and decrepitude, supported by a lay disciple named **Jayadeva.** While the Tibetan pilgrim was there, another Turkish raid took place, the object of which was to hunt down and kill any monk, who obstinately remained or to ransack the ruins in the hope of finding buried treasure. The monks had been warned earlier about the impending

raid and all had left Nalanda except the old monk and his Tibetan pupil, who carried his master to a safe distance into hiding. While they were in hiding, 300 Turkish soldiers arrived, armed and ready for the assault. Finding the place empty, they left. Then the two refugees stole out of their hiding place and returned to Nalanda. Dharmaswarmin records that the Tibetan pupil finally completed his studies and returned home with the teacher's consent. This is the last glimpse of Nalanda vouchsafed to us before its lapse into utter darkness! (Ref: Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India by Sukumar Dutt, pages 347-348)

The extermination of Buddhist monks dealt a fatal blow to the organization of the *Sangha* in India. With the monks gone, no one was left to carry on their work or lead the demoralized laity who were forcibly converted to Islam or absorbed into Hinduism and Jainism. Although the latter religions were subjected to the same persecution, their priests and leaders were not easily recognized among their people to be singled out for extermination. So they could survive and rebuild their communities. The high-caste Brahmin priests had always opposed Buddhism (**Note 7**) because of its criticism of the unjust caste system and while it was under the protection of royal patronage, they had kept silent. After the downfall of Buddhism, they could act without restraint, and began to appropriate and convert Buddhist temples that had escaped destruction into Hindu temples (**Note 8**). In parts of India far from the invaders' control, the caste system regained its dominance and under community pressure, the demoralized Buddhist laity was absorbed into Hinduism, into the lowest castes.

Yet a handful of survivors were left in the aftermath of the **Buddhist Holocaust**. They dispersed and fled with their cherished treasures of Buddhist scriptures to remote secluded monasteries far away from the invader's track or to the nearest port to take ship and sail to **Arakan** or **Burma** for safety. A few of them were later found to be sheltered and settled at the areas of **Chittagong** and Arakan, the south-eastern corner of Bangladesh, who have been claiming direct lineage with the Buddhists of the glorious past. Many trekked north across the Himalayas to seek sanctuary in the more hospitable countries of **Nepal** and **Tibet**. Thus came about the final dispersal of

the Buddhist *Sangha* in India. With the downfall of Buddhism in India, the Buddhist shrines and monuments fell into disuse. They were plundered and destroyed, or just ignored and neglected, and in the course of time fell into ruins and oblivion. **This period is the saddest part of Buddhism** that must not be forgotten.

According to **A. K. Warder** (Indian Buddhism, page 484), when confronted with the new wave of devastation by the fanatical Turks of Afghanistan, the Buddhist countries of Central Asia and Northern India could apparently not find enough good soldiers, enough military spirit to defend themselves. **The Buddha's teaching of non-violence must surely have had some effect.** Formerly Buddhism had spread among the barbarian peoples themselves (notably the Kushans under **Kanishka** and Bactrians under **Milinda**) thus defying the forces of militarism and destruction by civilising the people who had practised them. The new invaders were different. They were not open to the idea of the people they had conquered for they already had their own religion and fanaticism. The Kushans saw in Buddhism a means to consolidate a great empire by promoting the harmony of its own people. The Turks did not concern themselves with consolidation (until much later under the Mughal Emperor Akbar) but only with expansion and more plunder and more slaves. They chose the way of violence and took all India with them destroying her civilization.

In 1684, after nearly five centuries of oppression, the Indians united under the **Maratha king Chhatrapati Shivaji** (Mumbai Airport is named after him) and were able to end Muslim rule in India. The decisive point for us is that Turkish power and Muslim rule had collapsed, the Marathas had re-established religious tolerance over most of India and the British continued this Maratha policy over a still wider area. It became possible for Buddhists not only to make pilgrimages to India but also to start restoring Bodhgaya, Sarnath and other holy shrines and once more to build temples for the monks to stay. In fact, the **demise of Muslim rule** and the **arrival of the British Raj** were the most significant events that paved the way for the revival of Buddhism in India.

7. Revival of Buddhism in India[13, 14]

7.1 A New Dawn for Buddhism in India

After the downfall of Buddhism in India, even the association of the name of Asoka with his pillars was quickly forgotten. According to the Muslim historian **Shams-i Siraj Afif** of the reign of **Sultan Firoz Shah of Delhi** (1351-88), when the two stone pillars at **Topra** and **Mirath** were transported to Delhi as trophies, many Brahmin *pandits* were asked to decipher the writing on the base of the pillars but none was able. In order to flatter the sultan, they concocted a fanciful reading that the inscriptions stated that no one would be able to remove the column from its place till there should arise in later days a Muslim king named Sultan Firoz. As to what the pillars were used for, Shams-i Siraj wrote that the local tradition was that these columns of stone had been the **walking sticks** of the accursed giant **Bhima** (one of the Pandava brothers of the *Mahabharata* folklore). It goes on to say that even the beasts in those days were much larger than nowadays and Bhima used them to goad his giant-sized cattle while tending them. When he died, these columns were left as memorials to him. (Ref: Legend of King Asoka by John S. Strong)

The disappearance of Buddhism in India lasted six centuries, from the 13^{th} to 18^{th} centuries AD. According to **Ven. Bhikkhu Jagdish Kashyap**, it was almost so complete that even in recent times, the local people of Patna, Rajgir and Mathura, once the strongholds of Buddhism, could not even recognize the Buddhist relics that were discovered there. While in many places, the Buddha statues that were not destroyed came to be worshipped as Hindu deities. Buddhist *stupas* that had been abandoned for centuries became so overgrown with wild vegetation and trees that they resembled small hills.

After six centuries of darkness, light dawn on Buddhism with the coming of the **British Raj** in the 18^{th} century that attracted a crop of scholars and explorers. These newcomers from the West were filled with enthusiasm to discover what lay hidden in this ancient country. Asokan pillars towering in the open were the first monuments that

came under their scrutiny. Their discoveries began in 1750 with the discovery of fragments of an Asokan inscription of the **Delhi-Mirath** Pillar, followed by inscriptions on the **Delhi-Topra** Pillar, the **Allahabad-Kosambi** Pillar and **Lauriya Araraj** and **Lauriya Nandangarh** Pillars, the last two in Bihar. During the early 19th century, rock inscriptions were found at **Girnar** in Gujerat, **Dhauli** in Orissa (Kalinga), and **Shahbazgarhi** near Peshawar in Pakistan.

With the discovery of these ancient inscriptions, the next task was to find out what was written and who was the author. But there was no Indian scholar competent enough to decipher them. In 1837, **James Princep**, an official of the Indian Mint and Secretary of the Asiatic Society of Bengal succeeded after several years of painstaking study and hard work, in deciphering the inscriptions, which were written in **Brahmi**. He published his results containing English translations of the seven pillar Edicts, the opening words of which were: "*Thus spake the beloved of gods, **King Piyadasi***"

Who was this King Piyadasi still remained a mystery. As luck would have it, that year **George Turnour,** an historian and officer of the Ceylon Civil Service, published his English translation of the **Mahavamsa**, a Pali chronicle of Ceylon. The occurrence of the word 'Piyadasi' in the Mahavamsa helped Princep in identifying King Piyadasi as the great **Buddhist Emperor Asoka**. The deciphering of the Asokan inscriptions and the identification of Asoka was an epoch-making event. It revealed that India during Asoka's time was **Buddhist India!** Obviously the Brahmins who wrote India's history had intentionally blacked out that golden period. This discovery enriched the history of India and of Buddhism to such an extent that all previous books on Indian history had to be re-written!

7.2 The Pioneers of Buddhist Revival in India[15, 16, 17]

The arrival of **Sir Alexander Cunningham** (1814 -1893) accelerated the discovery and restoration of the archaeological sites in India. He was the first Director General of Archaeology and undoubtedly the **greatest explorer of Buddhist heritage in India**. He came to India

in 1833 and served in the army and other government departments in India and Burma as an engineer. He took up archaeology because he had an innate concern for ancient remains, and was deeply disturbed by the way the monuments were suffering from the ravages of nature and the plunder of man. His association with Buddhist monuments began when he undertook excavation of the Dhamek *stupa* in Sarnath around 1840 where he saw the irreparable damage of its beautiful facade due to the **meanness Jagat Singh**, minister of Benares (see page 106). His achievements as an archaeologist during a span of 28 years led to his appointment as Surveyor of Indian Archaeology in 1861. That same year a French scholar, **M. Stanisla Julien**, had published a translation of the travel records of the famous Chinese pilgrim **Hsüang Tsang** who was in India in 629-644 AD.

Following the descriptions of cities, places and land routes recorded by the Chinese pilgrims Fa Hsien and Hsüang Tsang in their travels, Cunningham initiated a systematic survey of the archaeological remains of northern India that resulted in the discovery of several ancient Buddhist sites such as **Kusinara, Sankasia, Savatthi**, **Nalanda, Kosambi** and many others that had become obscured with time. In 1865, the department was abolished but revived in 1870, with **Cunningham as Director**, the post he held until he retired in 1885. During his retirement in London until his death in 28 November 1893, he wrote several books on Buddhism based on his findings. His contribution to the restoration of Buddhist Heritage in India is unrivalled. Buddhists in particular owe him a special debt.

While Cunningham dedicated himself to the restoration of Buddhist heritage sites, another person who dedicated his life to reclaiming them back to Buddhists was **Anagarika Dharmapala** (1865-1933), **pioneer of the Buddhist revival-movement** in India. Born in Sri Lanka by the name of **David Hewavitarana**, he later took the name of Anagarika Dharmapala, which means “Homeless Guardian of the Dhamma”. Dharmapala came to Bodhgaya in 1891 after reading several articles written by **Sir Edwin Arnold**, author of the “**Light of Asia**”, describing the deplorable condition of the Maha Bodhi Temple, the most sacred place of worship of Buddhists. What he saw shocked and saddened him so deeply that he vowed to devote his life “*to make this sacred spot to be cared for by our own bhikkhus*”.

Realizing that it would not be an easy task to accomplish unless the message of the Buddha spread, he founded the **Maha Bodhi Society of India** to spearhead the movement. With the Maha Bodhi Society, started the process that generated considerable interest about the rich heritage of Buddhism, which had nearly become extinct in the country of its origin. Starting at Bodhgaya, where the battle to regain control of the **Mahabodhi Temple** began, the Maha Bodhi Society expanded its activities to Sarnath, venue of the First Sermon.

When Anagarika Dharmapala came to India in 1891, Sarnath had been reduced to a tiny village surrounded by jungle, which was the grazing ground of wild pigs. Dharmapala decided to restore it into a living shrine, by building a new *vihara* beside the famous Deer Park. With the completion of the **Mulagandha Kuti Vihara** in 1931, and the subsequent establishment of the Maha Bodhi Society Library, Free Clinic, Schools and Teachers Training College, Pilgrims' Hostel and *Sangharama*, Sarnath is once again pulsating with life.

Without the financial assistance of its benefactors, the Maha Bodhi Society would not be able to accomplish much of its Buddhist Revival activities. Chief among its benefactors was **Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Mikahala Foster**, Hawaiian wife of a wealthy American banker in Honolulu. Anagarika Dharmapala met her on board the SS Oceanic at Honolulu on 18 October 1893. It was said that she had a fiery temper that she found hard to control. Anagarika Dharmapala assisted her to cultivate calmness in order to gain control over the bad temper. She was so impressed by this change that she decided to use her enormous wealth to support the Buddhist Revival Movement headed by Anagarika Dharmapala. Known as "**Visakha of Modern Buddhist Revival**", she was the principal sponsor of the activities of the Maha Bodhi Society. A marble plaque inscription in front of the Mulagandhakuti Vihara in Sarnath records her great support below:

"**MULAGANDHAKUTI VIHARA** Erected by the **ANAGARIKA DHARMAPALA**, Founder and General Secretary of the Maha Bodhi Society with the Help of **MRS. MARY ELIZABETH FOSTER** of Honolulu and Others on the Site where **OUR LORD BUDDHA GAUTAMA** Promulgated the Saddhamma 2520 Years Ago. May all living beings be happy! 2475 B.E. 1931 C.E."

Another great personality who was a friend in need was the famous archeologist, **Sir John Marshall,** Director General of Archeological Survey of India 1902-1928, best known for his discovery of Indus Valley Civilization at Harappa and Mohenjodaro and his excavations of Taxila which lasted twenty years. In 1925, when the Indian Government decided to stop the construction of the Mulagandhakuti Vihara on the grounds that it was too near the Dhamek Stupa, the Maha Bodhi Society appealed for his help. A meeting was held in Taxila (near Islamabad) between Sir John Marshall, **Devapriya Valisinha**, secretary of the Maha Bodhi Society and **Dr. C. A. Hewavitarne** younger brother of Anagarika, in which the Sarnath Vihara building in question was discussed. As a result of the intervention of Sir John Marshall, the dispute was amicably settled in 1926 with an offer of an alternative plot of land for the Vihara by the Indian Government, financial compensation of expenditure incurred on earlier foundation works and 20 acres of land to be developed into a park at their cost as an annexe to the Vihara.

On the other hand, the people of nearby **Varanasi showed complete indifference** towards the Buddhist cause. As a matter of record, none of its citizens contributed even a single rupee towards the cost of the Vihara. (**Ref:** The Maha Bodhi, Vol. 46, October 1938, pp. 433-34)

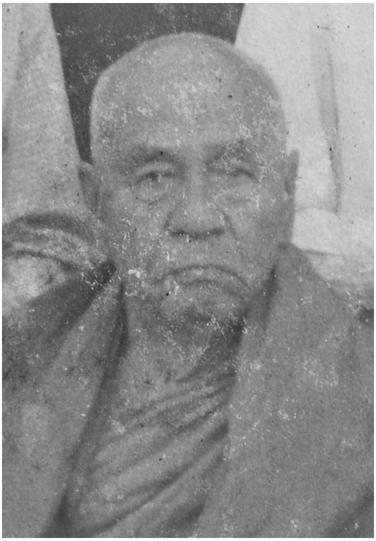
With its headquarters in Calcutta, the Maha Bodhi Society has expanded its activities to many cities in India, as well as overseas in Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka, England and USA. The impact of the expanding activities of the Maha Bodhi Society was soon felt throughout India spurring millions of low caste Hindus to embrace Buddhism, following the example of their leader **Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar,** Champion of the Depressed Castes of India who chose **Sayadaw U Chandramani** of Kushinagar to be his mentor in a historic ceremony on 14 October 1956 in Nagpur, Maharashtra. The Nagpur event was the **greatest religious conversion** in the history of mankind. It opened the floodgates for the masses of low-caste Hindus to enter the fold of Buddhism and escape the scourge of the caste system, as each year more and more low-caste Hindus embrace Buddhism swelling the Buddhist population to about 50 million today according to estimates by Buddhist scholars.

Gradually, all the Eight Great Places of pilgrimage were restored and developed as religious-cum-tourist resorts. Most of them have regained much of their lost glory and are pulsating with life, thanks to the concerted efforts of the *Sangha*, archeologists, historians, scholars and lay devotees in their restoration. In particular, the **Burmese and Sri Lankan Buddhists** have played a crucial role by building *viharas* to accommodate the *Sangha* so that the *bhikkhus* can act as custodians of the holy shrines and enhance the sanctity of the environment. Many of these venerable monks have lived in India nearly their whole life **serving the cause of the *Sasana*** with great determination and patience, despite all the hardships, including a very poor diet, poor living conditions and environment. Many of the shrines are located in rural areas that lack basic amenities, and the monks there play a useful role in promoting the education and welfare of the local population. Once again, they are living shrines, worthy of worship and veneration to which thousands of devotees come every year from all over the world to pay homage to the **Greatest Teacher** (*Sattha*) the world has ever known, the Lord Buddha, and earn merit by this pilgrimage of piety and faith.

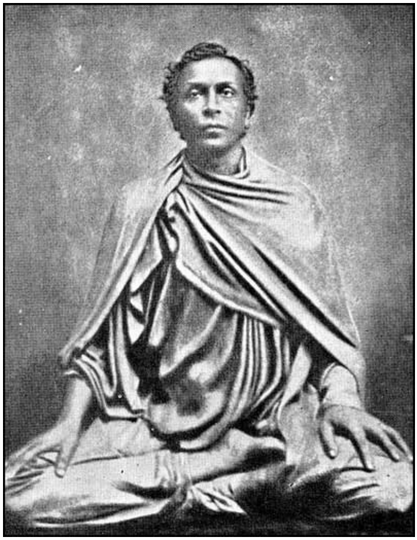
A visit to these **repositories of glorious Buddhist heritage** will certainly uplift the mind and enable one to develop many noble qualities. The sight of fellow pilgrims, who come from far and wide, with the common aim of honouring the Blessed One, will surely arouse appreciative joy (*mudita*) in one's heart. For the skillful pilgrim the sight of these once glorious shrines that are now mostly in ruins can be an opportunity to reflect on the impermanence of all conditioned things (*sankhara*) and arouse the religious urgency to practice the Lord's Teaching.

For the disciple who has completed this journey of piety and faith, the spiritual impact is unique and unforgettable. No place on earth can offer the pilgrim **more powerful and inspiring objects of faith** than those one gets to see and worship at the Eight Great Places of Pilgrimage. In fact, the sights of these holy shrines impact so deeply in the mind that the pilgrim will always remember these revered images with joy long after the journey. All devout Buddhists should heed the Buddha's exhortation and go on a pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime to experience the benefits.

The Four Great Pioneers of Buddhist Revival in India



1. Ven. U Chandramani of Kushinagar, Hero of the Sasana in India (1876-1972)



2. Anagarika Dhammapala, Founder of Maha Bodhi Society of India (1864-1933)



3. Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar, Champion of Untouchables of India (1891-1956)



4. Gen. Alexander Cunningham, Explorer of Buddhist Heritage in India (1814-1893)

8. Sayadaw U Chandramani of Kushinagar, Hero of the *Sasana* in India[18, 19]

The greatest religious conversion in the history of mankind took place on 14 October 1956 at a 14-acre vacant plot of land now known as '**Diksha Bhumi**' in Nagpur**,** Maharashtra (see Plate 49). On that historic day, 380,000 Dalits (Untouchables) converted to Buddhism under the leadership of **Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar**. The person chosen by Dr. Ambedkar to administer the Three Refuges and Five Precepts was none other than **Sayadaw U Chandramani** of Kushinagar, whom Dr. Ambedkar regarded as his true mentor. The Nagpur conversion was indeed a great miracle because never before in the history of any religion in the world has so many people at one time and at the instance of one man changed their religion voluntarily.

Why, of all Buddhist monks living in India at that time, did such an intelligent leader as Dr. Ambedkar choose Ven. U Chandramani, a Burmese Sayadaw to be his *Dhamma* guru and mentor? The answer to this question is revealed by reading life story of this noble personage, whom many regard as the "Hero of the *Sasana*" in India.

8.1 The Early Years

Sayadaw U Chandramani was born on June 1876 in **Akyab** district (modern Sittwe) of Arakan (Rakkhine) State in Myanmar. He was the eldest of three siblings, born to rich parents. At the age of ten, he studied under his uncle **Sayadaw Ashin U Sandimar**, a famous Tipitaka teacher. Two tears later he became a *samanera* and was named **Shin Chandra** ('Shin' in Burmese means 'novice'). At that time, **Anagarika Dhammapala** and **Colonel Olcott**, founders of the Maha Bodhi Society of India had arrived in Sittwe to help form a Maha Bodhi Society there. At a meeting in Sittwe, Colonel Olcott explained the necessity of reviving the Buddha *Sasana* in India and suggested that a young novice who had the necessary courage and qualifications should be selected, trained and posted to India. Finally

two novices from Sayadaw U Sandimar's monastery, Shin Chandra and Shin Thuriya were chosen for the task. In November 1891, **Shin Chandra** and **Shin Thuriya**, together with student, **Thar Doe Oo**, as attendant and companion, set sail on the noble mission for India.

On arrival, the trio went to stay at to the Kuthodaw Rest House in Bodhgaya built by King Mindon (1808−1878) near the Bodhi tree. They were placed under the charge of a learned Sri Lankan monk, **Ven. Chandajoti**, who lived there with three other Sri Lankan *bhikkhus* namely: **Ven. Sumangala**, **Ven. Pemmananda** and **Ven. Sudassana**. The Hindu Mahant who was occupying the Mahabodhi Temple objected to the presence of the *bhikkhus*. In February 1892, he instigated his followers to ransack the Rest House resulting in two of the monks being severely beaten up by his men. Luckily, the Burmese novices and their attendant were out with some visitors.

When news of the attack reached Anagarika Dhammapala and Colonel Olcott, they travelled from Calcutta to rescue Ven. Chandajoti, Shin Chandra, Shin Thuriya and Thar Doe Oo. A pupil of Ven. Sumangala, who also suffered some beating, accompanied them to stay in a house near Gaya. It took Ven. Sumangala four months in hospital to recover. From that time onwards, no Buddhist monks or lay worshippers were allowed to stay at the Kuthodaw Rest House. (**Note 9**)

Horrified by the incident, Shin Chandra went back to Burma in 1892 but returned to Calcutta within a few months, in 1893, with great determination to continue his mission in India. In Calcutta, Shin Chandra and Thar Doe Oo met the **Arakanese merchant U Kyi Zayi** who was so impressed by the young *samanera* that he decided to provide them lodgings at the Arakanese Maha Bodhi Society building. They stayed there with an Indian monk, **Ven. U Jinananda** who acted as their tutor. Unfortunately the Society broke up just before the start of the 1895 rains-retreat, and the novice and his friend had to move to another temple under the charge of **Ven. Mahawira.** He was so impressed by the keenness of Shin Chandra, that he rented a small house for them at Gamma Village in Ghazipur District, where Shin Chandra studied Pali, Hindi and Sanskrit under

an Indian **Pandit Jarnegayran**. It was in Gamma Village that both Shin Chandra and Thar Doe Oo started to eat only vegetarian meals.

Meanwhile Ven. Mahawira was thinking of returning to his permanent abode in **Kushinagar**. When U Kyi Zayi heard this, he approached Ven. Mahawira and expressed his wish to donate a monastery provided a suitable plot of land was found in Kushinagar. Ven. Mahawira went there to search for a suitable site and found one. He negotiated with the Hindu landowner to sell him a five-acre plot of land at thirty-five rupees per acre and informed U Kyi Zayi who donated one thousand rupees to start the building. Unfortunately on the way to Kushinagar, Ven. Mahawira was robbed of all the cash and he had to put up temporarily with a Hindu Sadhu nearby.

8.2 Shin Chandra Comes to the Rescue of Ven. Mahawira

One day, a letter came from U Kyi Zayi in Calcutta explaining that he had donated one thousand rupees to Ven. Mahawira to build a monastery in Kushinagar. He suggested that Shin Chandra should go there to assist. Although he only had half a rupee for the train fare, Shin Chandra and a Punjabi friend named Yogi set out on foot. After three days walking, they got a train and arrived at **Deoria Station** the next morning. There they heard the bad news that Ven. Mahawira had been robbed. They did not know where he was but heard rumors that he was still at Gorakhpur town, about 50 miles away. So they took a train to **Gorakhpur** only to learn that he was actually in Kushinagar 35 miles away. Shin Chandra and Yogi started off on foot on that 35-mile journey to find Ven. Mahawira staying with a Hindu Sadhu. Shin Chandra cabled U Kyi Zayi with details of what had happened. Soon they received another donation of one thousand rupees from U Kyi Zayi to start the building, with a further guarantee that any additional money required would also be provided by him. Ven. Mahawira then bought the plot of land in 1898. Shin Chandra assisted him with the buying and storage of building materials including timber, bricks and mortar.

8.3 Scriptural Training and Higher Ordination in Burma

Three months later, Shin Chandra returned to Gamma village to resume his studies. While he was there the Head Teacher suddenly died of cholera. Shin Chandra became very sad and depressed. When U Kyi Zayi learned about the tragedy, he quickly arranged to send him back to Moulmein to spend the rains-retreat in 1899. After the rain-retreat, Shin Chandra was transferred to Mandalay where he studied the Pali Scriptures under several renowned teachers and attained mastery in Pali and Buddhist Philosophy. While studying, he also was teaching Sanskrit to other students, notably to a novice, **Shin Sakkapala**, who in later life was to become a well-known **Aggamahapandita, Taung Pauk Sayadaw**.

While in Mandalay, Shin Chandra also received Higher Ordination (*Upasampada*) at the **Panwar Vihara** (also known as Ramugrama Vihara) in February 1903. His preceptor was his uncle Sayadaw U Sandimar of Akyab. Our new Bhikkhu, **Ashin Chandramani**, followed Sayadaw U Sandimar to Akyab. After two months in Akyab, he returned to Kushinagar to stay with Ven. Mahawira.

Together with three other monks, they spent *vassa* (rain-retreat) that year in Kushinagar. He spent his time teaching his three fellow monks Hindi, Sanskrit and Pali, as well as Buddhist literature to five local Indians. Ashin Chandramani also assisted in completing the unfinished parts of the building that U Kyi Zayi had donated.

Thereafter Ashin Chandramani started to translate the Dhammapada into Hindi and in 1909 a thousand copies were distributed in India. He also translated two important medical books from Sanskrit to Burmese. His translation from Pali into Hindi and Sanskrit included *Maha Satipatthana Sutta, Anatta Lakkhana Sutta* and *Sangiti Sutta*. He spent most of his time translating other Buddhist books, documents and journals into Hindi and Sanskrit so that Indians would become interested in Buddhism and understand it better.

8.4 Passing Away of Venerable Mahawira

Ven. Mahawira, who was of Arakanese-Indian parentage, was the first Hindu in modern times to become a Buddhist monk. He was formerly a wrestler and while in Sri Lanka, he became interested in Buddhism. In 1890, he was ordained as a monk. In 1891, he returned to India and took up abode in Kushinagar. At that time, Kushinagar was a deserted place. Through the generosity of the merchant U Kyi Zayi and his wife Daw Mi Chan Mra, Ven. Mahawira was able to purchase a 5-acre plot of land near the Mahaparinibbana Temple and construct a Rest House in 1901, followed by a Buddha Vihara in 1902. It was in that monastery he passed away in March 1919, at a ripe old age of 85. Sayadaw U Chandramani was left to make the funeral arrangements in consultation with his local devotees and friends, and upon hearing the sad news U Kyi Zayi donated one thousand rupees towards the funeral expenses. The body of Ven. Mahawira was cremated and his ashes were enshrined in a small brick *stupa* within the grounds of the Mahaparinibbana Temple. Sayadaw U Chandramani then continued his mission as Abbot of the Burmese Buddhist Monastery in Kushinagar.

8.5 Establishing a Monastery in Sarnath

After the demise of Ven. Mahawira, Sayadaw U Chandramani worked even harder to revive the Buddha Sasana in India. In 1908, he established a small monastery in Migadarvoon (Deer Park) forest in Sarnath where the Lord Buddha had preached the First Sermon. Later, his nephew **Ashin U Kittima** came to stay in the Migadarvoon forest (Isipatana) and was trained in the local languages and Buddhist literature. Thereafter he was put in charge of the monastery and Sayadaw U Chandramani returned to Kushinagar. The weather at Migadarwoon Forest was bad and food was scarce. Some devotees from the Andaman Islands built a brick building in Varanasi at a cost of some thirty thousand rupees and donated it to Ashin Kittima. The Forest Monastery at Migadarwoon had no permanent resident monk at that time; however, a watchman was employed to look after the Monastery and the pilgrims.

8.6 Confirming Kushinagar as Site of Mahaparinibbana

In 1901 Sayadaw U Chandramani and the merchant U Kyi Zayi applied to the English Governor of India in Calcutta seeking his permission to allow pilgrims to worship the historic reclining Buddha image inside the Mahaparinibbana temple. The Governor in turn referred their application to the Indian Law Department in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. The Lucknow Law Department replied that it had not been officially established that Kushinagar was the site of **Lord Buddha's Mahaparinibbana** although the minister-in-charge of the Antiquities Department had stated that it was so but others had disputed it. Further excavations of the Mahaparinibbana site revealed the presence of several copper blocks containing Brahmi characters.

As the Indian Stone Inscription Research Department was unable to decipher them, the copper blocks were sent to London for verification. After two years, the British experts deciphered the Brahmi script to read as follows: "**The Lord Buddha passed away here on this site**." Only then did the Indian Government officially recognize Kushinagar as the site of the Buddha's Mahaparinibbana. Thus the ancient Mahaparinibbana Temple once again became a living shrine. Its possession by Sayadaw U Chandramani in 1904 was a significant step in the Buddhist revival movement. It has made Kushinagar one of the most sacred Buddhist shrines for pilgrims to visit and worship.

8.7 Acquisition of land to support Sasana growth

To support the growth of the Buddha Sasana in poverty-stricken rural India, it was necessary for the Burmese Buddhist Temple to be self-sufficient. Before long, fourteen acres of bush situated thirty miles from Kushinagar were acquired. Volunteers cut down the trees and the local villagers who rented the land prepared it for cultivation and planted various crops. The villagers had prepared the deed of the rented land in the name of U Chandramani. This was followed by the acquisition of ten acres situated at the front of the Kushinagar Temple, and another ten acres at the back of the Temple at a total

cost of two hundred fifty rupees. These twenty acres of land were contracted out to a supporter at a nearby village for cultivation. Gradually, this land became very important to Sayadaw U Chandramani and a vital aspect of his Sasana promotional work.

Twelve years passed by. One day an Englishman named **Nicol Masaye**, **District Commissioner of Deoria** came to Kushinagar to pay his respects first to the Mahaparinibbana Buddha statue and then to Sayadaw U Chandramani. Mr. Masaye mentioned that he had travelled to many countries and had seen many large and attractive images but had never seen one as life-like and capable of arousing the emotions as this Mahaparinibbana Buddha image. In his opinion it was the most original and most beautiful object in the world. Mr. Nicol Masaye further enquired how a foreign Bhikkhu like Sayadaw could survive in Kushinagar; whether he had any friends there to rely upon, and how many acres of land he had to survive on. Surprised to find out that Sayadaw only owned 34 acres he suggested that Sayadaw should look for more land and make an application to him. He added that as the Indian Government was then in the process of drawing up legislation to nationalize the country's farmland, Sayadaw should act quickly and he would help. Before he returned to Deoria he also asked Sayadaw to inform him if he ever was in need of urgent help as Sayadaw was a foreigner.

Accepting the District Commissioner's offer, Sayadaw selected a plot of bush measuring about fifty acres situated about 2½ km from Kushinagar. The application was submitted in the name of Sayadaw U Chandramani to the District Commissioner's Office in Deoria. When news of the application leaked out, people from five nearby villages protested strongly and filed an objection as follows:

- U Chandramani was a foreigner and as such he should not be given the right to hold the deeds of any Indian land;
- The fifty acres was not bush but pasture used for grazing cattle and oxen and belonged to the five villages;
- There was a Mahashiva Cave, a religious cave respected by all races living in the land (Note: the Cave was installed overnight as soon as the news of Sayadaw's application leaked out and spread to the villagers);

- If it were to be given away as agricultural land, only the surrounding villagers should share it.

Not only did the villagers protest against Sayadaw's application, they also boycotted the five families who supported Sayadaw. The Land Office came to investigate and found that the land actually was bush and the Cave was a new one hastily put up overnight. However, a District Officer examined the case and decided that U Chandramani should not be given all fifty acres but only ten acres.

Sayadaw U Chandramani was not satisfied with the District Officer's decision and hired a lawyer to lodge an appeal. The District Commissioner, Mr Nicol Masaye, advised Sayadaw not to send the appeal in his name alone because the law did not permit sole ownership of fifty acres or more of Government land. He suggested that Sayadaw should form an association and apply for ownership in the name of the association. Sayadaw therefore invited bhikkhus from Kushinagar and Varanasi, and together they formed an association called '**Kushinagar Bhikkhu Sangha Association**', headed by Sayadaw U Chandramani as President. The Committee members were **Ashin Dhammarakkhita** of Kushinagar, and **U Kittima**, **U Ezzutananda** and **U Pyinna Wontha** of Varanasi.

Not long after that, the Deoria DC invited Sayadaw and the leaders of the five villages to his Office and tried to mediate an amicable settlement. Mr. Masaye explained that even though U Chandramani was a foreigner, the Bhikkhu himself had been living amongst them and struggling to survive in that land, and therefore he thought the Bhikkhu deserved the fifty acres. The village leaders disagreed and continued to strongly protest against the Bhikkhus' application. Mr. Masaye gave up trying to mediate between the Bhikkhus and the villagers. Using his authority, and in line with the prevailing law of the country, he finally made a decision and granted ownership of the fifty-acres of land to the Kushinagar Bhikkhu Sangha Association

8.8 Decision of Indian High Court

The villagers were very unhappy with the Deoria DC's decision and appealed to the **High Court in Allahabad**. While the case was in progress, Sayadaw instructed his workers to prepare the land for cultivation. Immediately, the villagers armed with sticks and swords tried to stop the workers. Sayadaw, convinced that having won the DC's decision he had the right to cultivate the land, instructed his men to continue working. The Government then sent fifty policemen to guard the workers and stop any untoward incident. After three months, the Allahabad High Court decided in Sayadaw’s favor. The villagers had to pay court costs as well. Dissatisfied with the outcome, they appealed to the **Supreme Court in New Delhi**.

While awaiting a decision from the Supreme Court and with the policemen still there guarding the land, Sayadaw continued to fell the trees. The villagers came out to buy the timber and the Association made about 2500 rupees in the first instance and altogether 5000 rupees. Using that money Sayadaw had transformed a wild bush into cultivated farmland in spite of opposition by the protesting villagers.

After one and a half years, the decision from the Supreme Court in New Delhi came. Sayadaw had again won the case and the villagers had lost including the court costs. Only then did they accept the verdict and give up their fight. But they made so much trouble for Sayadaw's supporters, that the five families were afraid to continue living in the village. The police were doing their best to protect Sayadaw as well as his supporters. Such were the hostile circumstances in which Sayadaw had to face to promote the Buddha Sasana, always urging his supporters to work hard and transform idle bush into arable farmland.

Five more village families came over to support Sayadaw, making a total of ten families. However, there was still no peace, since the protesters from the five villages continually sought every possible opportunity to create trouble for them. It took seven years to transform the bush into arable farmland. In the meantime, the Kushinagar Bhikkhu Sangha Association decided to insert into the Land Title that whatever produce obtained out of those fifty acres of

land, the resident Bhikkhus of the Kushinagar Temple would have sole responsibility to manage and benefit from it. Sayadaw then had over fifty acres of farmland, including the thirty-four acres bought previously in his own name. That farmland was rented out to the villagers and every year he collected about twenty wooden bowls (one hundred kilos) of rice in place of rent.

There was a five-acre plot of land on which Sayadaw had planted fruit trees and these trees were growing to form a beautiful garden. The rest of the land produced other crops and vegetables according to the season. Sayadaw appointed five of his Indian supporters from the village to oversee the work in the fields and the security of the workers. Slowly but surely the situation with the surrounding villagers improved and peace was restored. The villagers could buy the seasonal produce cheaply from Sayadaw's fields including rice, fruits and vegetables; they could also rent plots of land from Sayadaw to raise farm animals such as cows, pigs and chickens. The situation therefore improved so much that the people from the five villages, except a minority of the stubborn leaders, happily greeted Sayadaw as their '**Chandramani Baba**' and respectfully touched his feet in Indian custom whenever they met him in the street. **Hence through his untiring efforts, patience, determination and goodwill, he earned their respect.**

Not long after peace had been completely restored with the villagers, Sayadaw received a letter from his childhood friend, the **former Shin Thuriya**, who first came to India with him. Thuriya was now a layman and he had established himself in Akyab as a prosperous rice merchant. Sayadaw was very happy to receive his friend's letter and reminisced about his long past as he replied to his friend. Sayadaw then allowed Maung Pho Yin who had accompanied him to Kushinagar to go on leave to his native village. As for Sayadaw, he was quite content to remain in Kushinagar looking after the pilgrims, monks and lay people alike. He made sure his guests had the things they needed and supported them morally and physically in any way he could. He was always looking forward to the revival of Buddha Sasana and better days to come in **Majjhimadesa** or India

8.9 Facing problems even with a Puja Ceremony

Once, Ven. Mahawira and Sayadaw U Chandramani organized a Puja ceremony to commemorate the Parinibbana of the Lord Buddha by burning a 25-foot long paper model of the Mahaparinibbana statue at the Cremation Stupa. The celebration was conducted on the full moon day of Wesakha. It was organized by the DC of Deoria and was very well attended. In order to include the Hindus in the celebration, a Hindu Sadhu was invited to light up the paper figure of the Buddha. His act drew protests from the crowd who declared that the Sadhu had become their enemy. By putting a torch to the effigy of the Gautama Buddha who was their enemy and who had different views from their own, the Sadhu had sinned. They screamed and shouted at the Sadhu and boycotted him. He suffered so much abuse in his village that he could bear it no longer. Therefore, he applied to DC's Court in Deoria seeking to prevent discrimination against him. The District Commissioner invited all the Hindu leaders from Kushinagar and Deoria District to a meeting. Among those attending the meeting were Ven. Mahawira and Sayadaw U Chandramani, the representative from the Antiquities Dept. and many Hindu Sadhus. The DC who chaired the meeting asked the Hindu leaders why the person in question should be ostracized. They unanimously replied that the Buddha was their enemy and because the Sadhu had put a torch to the effigy of the Buddha, he had sinned.

The DC then quoted from the **Ramayana Epic** citing the abduction of King Rama’s wife, Sita, by the wicked King Dasagiri and asked if Dasagiri was a foe or a friend of Rama whom they all worshipped. They replied that King Dasagiri was the foe of King Rama. The DC asked if it was true that they made an effigy of King Dasagiri their enemy, and put a torch to the effigy each year. They agreed and said that as Hindu sages they took turns to burn the effigy. When asked if that person was sinning against their belief they agreed that was not the case. The DC then concluded that if a Hindu sage were to put a torch to their enemy Buddha's effigy, he was not committing a sin by the same reason. The DC warned that there were laws to prevent discrimination and victimization and he had no choice but to take appropriate action. The Hindu leaders were reluctant to press on with their argument and agreed to take the Hindu Sage back into their

association. Satisfied with this, The DC compensated the Sadhu one hundred rupees, with an instruction that he should invite all the Hindu sages to celebrate the occasion with a big feast.

8.10 No Drinking from a Well Belonging to a Low Caste

Ven. Mahawira and Ashin U Chandramani organized the digging of a well in the grounds of the Kushinagar Temple; its water was pure and very clear. Everyone including the surrounding villagers were allowed to use the well, in view of the scarcity and difficulty of obtaining potable water in that area. However, a few Hindu Sages started to spread rumours that U Mahawira and U Chandramani were of low caste and hence the well dug by them should not be used for drinking or washing. It had not gone through a purification ceremony as required by Hindu custom; therefore, Hindus must not drink or use that water and rumours were spread throughout the villages and surrounding district.

Sayadaw Mahawira and U Chandramani explained that as Buddhist monks, they were sons of the Buddha and as such, they had no high or low caste system. In Sri Lanka and Myanmar, the people did not perform any purification ceremony when they dug a well as there were no such instructions in the Buddhist texts. The villagers had been given permission to drink or make use of the water from the well and it was up to them to use it or not. Some villagers decided to drink and make full use of the water and some did not; even today, the situation remains as before, although some present day villagers are changing and are not bothered by this matter.

8.11 Opening of Free Schools And Colleges

In attempting to promote Buddha Sasana, it is acknowledged that young people are more acceptable to change than their elders. Keeping that in mind and in consultation with a visitor from Sri Lanka named **Anagarika Nuhawkawdar**, Sayadaw U Chandramani

had a bamboo-shed built within the compounds of the Kushinagar Temple and opened it as a non-fee paying Primary School. That was an opportunity for his antagonists to arouse the surrounding villagers and to cause some resentment. They declared that if the children were to go to that school, all of them would become Buddhists and lose their Hindu belief. At a meeting they decided that none of their children would be allowed to attend the Chandramani School. However, the poorer families could not afford to take their children elsewhere; they had no choice but to educate them at a free school. As a result the Chandramani School had a first intake of five students secretly sent by their parents. A full-time teacher who was very dedicated and hard working was available to teach the five children. After failing to persuade the parents against sending their children to the school, the antagonists now abused and threatened the children on their way to the school and even harmed them. In spite of all this mistreatment, the antagonists' attempts failed; the number of students increased to forty within the first year.

In order to accommodate the increased intake, it was decided to erect a new brick building. Soon donors came forward to pay for the cost of the one-storey brick building named "**Chandramani Primary School**"; the name was carved in stone and a signpost proudly displayed. The Chandramani Primary School gradually grew and enrolment reached 350 students and 3 full-time teachers. The children were very disciplined and their education improved. In consultation with the School Committee, Sayadaw U Chandramani then organized and built a Secondary School and handed it over to the Government. Again Sayadaw worked very hard to build a '**New High School**' to his own taste and specifications; he organized and planned it with the help of the School Committee and was very successful. Sayadaw completely furnished the New High School and handed it over to the Government to run it. Not content with just building high schools, Sayadaw also built the '**Kushinagar Degree College**' with an intake capacity of over five hundred students. This was made possible with the help of a rich man who owned a sugar mill, together with city dignitaries and parents of Gorakhpur town, who had great respect and regard for the Most Venerable Ashin U Chandra. The famous Kushinagar Degree College still stands today, as a symbol of the Sayadaw's love and affection for his people.

Many pupils graduated from the Chandramani Primary, Secondary and High Schools and, even today, are working all over India, all of them occupying responsible positions. They were very grateful to Sayadaw and deeply respected him for his good deeds. Daily, between 100-150 pilgrims visit Sayadaw to pay their respects. Sayadaw was like a college professor and very highly regarded for his intimate knowledge of Hindu languages and local dialects and also for the appropriate use of them.

8.12 Sayadaw U Chandramani becomes an Indian Citizen

The promotion of the Buddha Sasana by Sayadaw U Chandramani alone could only achieved satisfactory results. In order to expand the Dhammaduta activities, Sayadaw invited all the Buddhist monks to a meeting. During the meeting, they agreed to form an organization called '**Majjhimadesa Maha Sangha Organization'**. (**Note:** In Buddhist texts, Majjhimadesa is defined as the districts where the Lord Buddha was enlightened, traveled and preached His Dhamma.)
The Majjhimadesa Maha Sangha Organization (MMSO) was headed by Kushinagar Sayadaw U Chandramani as President and Sravasti Jetavana Temple Sayadaw U Mahinda as Second President. Other members of the Committee were Varanasi Temple Sayadaw U Sandimar who was famous for his patience, and Sayadaw U Kittima, an expert in Myanmar and Pali literature, English, Hindi, Sanskrit and Urdu languages, as well as stone inscriptions. All the rest of the participating Sangha became members of MMSO.

Because the Indian Government did not recognize an organization formed by non-nationals, Saradaw U Chandramani and Saradaw U Sandimar decided to become naturalized Indian citizens. After that they could register MMSO officially. To fulfill the Organization's aims, two Suttas, namely; **Mangala Sutta** and **Parabhava Sutta** were translated from Pali to Hindi and distributed countrywide. This was followed by translations & distributions of the **Anattalakkhana Sutta** and **Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta**.

With the formation of an officially recognized **Bhikkhu Sangha** organization, the Buddha Sasana is now set to grow just as a giant tree can only grow if its main root is firmly established. By becoming Indian citizens, Sayadaw U Chandramani and Sayadaw U Sandimar had permanently planted their roots in India. The main person, who enthusiastically carried out the duties of the MMSO, was Ashin U Sandimar.

8.13 Revival of the Buddha Sasana in Nepal

According to history, Buddhism was a dominant religion until the time of **King Jayasthiti Malla** who ruled Nepal during medieval times (around 1382 C.E.). He imposed the Hindu caste system in Nepal and banned Buddhist culture and tradition forcing the celibate monks to disrobe and return to lay life.

Suppression of Buddhism by the Hindu rulers is seen by the fact that after Nepal came under British rule around 1816, Brian Hodgson went there as Assisant to the Resident in a new office. He obtained many manuscripts from Buddhist pundits such as **Amrutananda** and sent the collection to Asiatic Society of Bengal and to India House in Paris and other libraries. Once, **Minister Rana Bahadur Jang of Nepal** seized a Buddhist Vihara and threw away all the books on the street. **Dr. Wrights**, who was the Physician to the British Resident salvaged them and presented them to Cambridge University. It was from these sourses that Burnuff and his disciple Max Muller compiled the early history of Buddhism. (Ref. 46, Chapter 15)

The situation worsened during the **Rana regime**, which ruled Nepal from 1846 to 1953 reducing the Shah monarch to a figurehead and making the Prime Minister and other government positions hereditary. That was the age when Buddhism was totally forgotten by the people of Nepal. The **Rana regime** banned all Buddhist activities and forbade people from converting to Buddhism but traditional Buddhists were allowed to become Hindus.

8. 14 Ordination of Nepalese Bhikkhus

Sayadaw U Chandramani played a dominant role in reviving the Buddha Sasana in Nepal by ordaining Nepalese into the Sangha and guiding them in the Dhamma and Vinaya. At that time there was no Bhikkhu Sangha in Nepal. For centuries Nepalese were aware of only Buddhist priests (*Vajracharya*) from *Newar* Buddhism (*Vajrayana*) and Tibetan Lamas. They were unaware of Theravada Buddhist monks and nuns. Vajracharyas are household monks. They lead domestic lives and are not celibate. Not all Tibetan monks are celibate. It depends on the school they belong to.

The first Nepalese to take ordination was **Ven. Mahapragna**, a Khattiya by birth. He was initially ordained as a '**Gelung**' (Tibetan monk) in 1926. Later, he was arrested for his conversion from Hindu to Buddhist monk and exiled to India. There he met Sayadaw U Chandramani in Kusinagara. Impressed by Sayadaw, he ordained as a Bhikkhu paving the way for Theravada ordination once again in the history of modern Nepal after almost 600 years. Another Nepalese who converted from Gelung to bhikkhu under Sayadaw U Chandramani was **Ven. Pragyananda**. He was the first yellow-robed monk to appear in the streets of Kathmandu valley at the end of 1930's. He stayed at **Kindol Vihara** at the invitation of **Dasaratna Shahu** (later Ven. Dhammaloka) and gave discourses. The attendance at his discourses increased day by day and it worried the Rana government, which arrested all the members of Vihara all of whom were imprisoned, fined and later released. Fortunately, Ven. Pragnananda was away at that time on pilgrimage in India.

Soon after his release from prison, **Dasaratna Shahu**, came to Kusinagar and ordained under Sayadaw U Chandramani as a novice under the name of **Dhammaloka** in 1932. He returned to Nepal as a monk but was arrested immediately on his arrival in Kathmandu and was imprisoned once again for six days and on the seventh day was taken to Court. When questioned by the Judge, he told him that he was a Kathmandu resident and a Buddhist. The Judge asked why he was wearing such clothing; he replied that in India there were two kinds of Buddhists, one 'Gahatta' and the other, 'Anagariya'; the Anagariya Bhikkhus wore the kind of clothing he was wearing.

The Judge then asked the police why such an obviously innocent person had been arrested. The police said that if all Nepalese were to dress like that there would be all kinds of problems for the country, and that was the reason Dhammaloka was arrested. The Judge said that not every Nepalese would act like that; only those who truly wished to reach Nirvana. The Judge therefore ruled that Ashin Dhammaloka was completely innocent and ordered him to be freed.
Following his release from prison, he went to stay at Kindol Vihara and continued his religious activities. He was finally able to carry out religious activities freely in Nepal. He succeeded in propagating Theravada Buddhism in the streets of Kathmandu valley.

Ven. Ammitananda was another well-known Buddhist scholar and pioneer who ordained in 1936 under Sayadaw U Chandramani in Kusinagara but was imprisoned along with Ven. Mahapragna at Bhojpur in 1937. In 1942, he came back to Nepal from abroad after completing his study and gave discourses at the request of Ven. Dhammaloka in Swayambhu during *vassa*. His public discourses impressed many people who came to listen to him. Other bhikkhus, samaneras and nuns of Nepal studying abroad also returned to join him and gave public discourses in different places of Kathmandu valley. This was a great breakthrough during the repressive Rana government. The Rana government had banned all public assembly for fear of political unrest and demand for political reform in Nepal.

Because of their religious activities, the monks were arrested on 30 July 1944 and brought before the then **Prime Minister Shamsher Jung Bahadur Rana**. He made new rules to curtail the Buddhist activities. Those who didn't follow these rules were asked either to leave the country or return to worldly life. All the venerable monks, who were active in revival of Theravada in Nepal refused to obey the order and were exiled once again from Nepal. The exiled monks this time included Ven. Pragnananda, Ven. Dhammaloka and many other monks. The exiled monks formed **'Dharmodaya Sabha'**, Nepal's first Buddhist organization on 30th November 1944 in India with **Sayadaw U Chandramani** as chairman and **Ven. Amittananda** as its general secretary.

When World War II ended in 1945, a Nepalese Bhikkhu returned home to test the situation; he found no one was giving him any trouble. Before long, some Nepalese Bhikkhus and Nuns in Kushinagar, bearing the powers of Triple Gems foremost in their minds, left for their homeland to carry on with the promotion of Theravada Buddhism. **Sayadaw U Chandramani** arranged to send some Bhikkhus to Myanmar and some to Sri Lanka to improve their education and knowledge of the scriptures. In Kathmandu, Ven. Dhammaloka took charge of building a Theravada Buddhist temple. Another temple 'Yanmangala Vihara' was built in the same city where **Ven. Buddhaghosa** took charge as the Head Bhikkhu.

The King of Nepal donated one hundred thousand rupees to the **Dharmodaya Sabha** to build more Buddhist rest houses for the Theravada Buddhists. Ven. Dhammaloka and Ven. Amittananda, both Nepalese nationals, played leading roles in the building programme. Thus, Theravada Buddhism came to thrive in Nepal and Buddha Sasana was once again firmly established.

Thanks to Sayadaw U Chandramani, the Buddha Sasana has been revived in the land of Lord Buddha's birth. Today there are 96 Theravada Viharas in the country, 303 Bhikkhus and Samaneras and 135 Anagarikas. Some are resident in Nepal and others are either studying or practising Dhamma overseas. (Source: The Ananda Bhoomi; year 33; issues 32 and 33).

8.15 Passing Away of Sayadaw U Chandramani

The **Most Venerable Kushinagar Sayadaw Ashin Chandramani** possessed all the necessary qualities, such as **patience**, **courage**, **stamina** and **untiring effort** to rebuild the Buddha Sasana in India, and to develop it in Nepal, and to carry on teaching and practising both Vipassana and Loving Kindness meditation. In addition to his Dhammaduta activities, he took a keen interest in the education of the young people of Kushinagar because he knew that any change of mindset would have to come from the younger generation. As Kushinagar is world famous as the final resting place of the Buddha,

many pilgrims as well as tourists make it a point to visit the Burmese Temple to pay their respects to Sayadaw, who was always concerned about the welfare of the pilgrims. While doing all that, he passed away in the Kushinagar Burmese Temple on **8 May 1972 at the age of 97**, **having lived nearly 80 years as a Bhikkhu in India** serving the cause of the Sasana with great determination and patience, despite all the hardships he faced including a very poor diet, poor living conditions and environment.

To all of Sayadaw's devotees, especially in India and Nepal, the news of his death was a great blow. He could never be replaced and they could never again find such a great missionary. **He was truly the Hero of the Sasana in India.** His death was a great loss to everyone, especially his devotees in Kushinagar. A total of thirty-two countries mourned his death and hundreds of messages expressing deep sorrow were received. Devotees of his native town of **Akyab (Sittwe)** made a bronze statue of him and installed it in the local monastery in 1973. A Burmese writer, U Tha Doe Hla of Mizan Quarter, Akyab wrote the book entitled "**The Life Story of Sri Bhaddanta Chandramani of Kushinagar** which was published in 1975 and translated into English in 1999. This article is extracted from the book. (**Ref. 18**)

As a tribute to his life-long service to the Buddha Sasana in India, the **U Chandramani Foundation Trust** was established in 2000 AD to continue his noble task. In 2004, a devotee of Nagpur in Maharashtra State donated 13 acres of land with two old buildings at **Bhanegaon Village near Nagpur** to the Foundation with the objective of starting a Buddhist center to propagate the Buddha's Teaching among the local villagers who are mostly **Dalits**. The present Bhikkhu-in-charge of this centre is **Sayadaw U Rakkhita Dhamma**, a Myanmar monk closely associated with the author since 1996 in Chanmyay Yeiktha Meditation Centre in Yangon. Presently, Sayadaw U Rakkhita Dhamma has a busy schedule teaching the local villagers about the Buddha Dhamma and conducting Vipassana and Metta meditation classes. Each year, he holds a novitiate programme for the local youths and leads them on alms round to the surrounding villages to acquaint them with Buddhist traditions.

9. The Life of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar [20, 21, 22]

No article on the Revival of Buddhism in modern India is complete without the mention of **Dr. B. R. Ambedkar** the **Undisputed Champion** of the **Untouchables** and the most gifted and qualified Untouchable ever born in India. Fondly addressed as '**Babasaheb**' or 'father-boss' by his followers, he embraced Buddhism in 1956 and following his clarion call, millions of followers have converted to Buddhism, swelling the Buddhist population in India to about **50 million today**. The ***Illustrated Weekly*** (Nov 18–24, 1979) describes him as the **Greatest Indian after the Buddha**. "What about Gandhi?" many asked. "We have nothing against anybody including the Mahatma. Anybody reading this book with an unbiased mind will certainly agree with our assessment of Babasaheb", says V. T. Rajshekar in his Foreword to "**Annihilation of Caste with a Reply to Mahatma Gandhi**" by B. R. Ambedkar M.A., Ph.D. (London); L.L.D. (Columbia); D.Sc. D.Litt. (Osmania); Barrister-at-Law

9.1 Babasaheb's Education

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was born in a **Mahar** family on 14 April 1891 in the town of **Mhow** near **Indore** in **Madhya Pradesh**. The Mahars form the single largest Untouchable community in Maharashtra and are found in every village living outside the village wall, performing the duty of watch and ward on behalf of the village. Because of their background as village watchmen, a large number of Mahars were recruited in the armies during the **British Raj**. Dr. Ambedkar's father **Ramji Sakpal** was serving as Headmaster in the Army school at the time of his birth but retired two years later. When he was five years old, his mother died. Later his father found another job at Satara where **Bhim** (as Bhimrao is fondly called) completed his primary education and began his secondary education.

Being an '**Untouchable**' by birth, Bhim was subjected to all sorts of indignities and injustices throughout his life. At school he had to go

without water regularly because he was forbidden to drink from the common water source lest he "**contaminate**" the water source. In class, Bhim and his brother Anandrao were made to sit on the floor on a gunny sack which they carried to school. Some of the teachers would not touch their note books nor put questions to them for fear of being **polluted**. The Sanskrit teacher even refused to teach them Sanskrit so Bhim had to take Persian as the second language in high school. The attitude of his classmates was no different He could not mix or play games with them. Once when the teacher called upon Bhim to solve a Maths problem on the blackboard, the whole class protested, with the caste-Hindu children crying out that his touch would pollute their tiffins kept behind the board. Only after the tiffins were removed was Bhim allowed to use the blackboard.

In 1904 the family moved to Bombay (Mumbai) where Bhim completed his secondary education. He secured a scholarship from the **Maharaja of Baroda** to join the Bombay University graduating in 1912. In 1913, barely a month after he joined the Baroda State Forces as a Lieutenant, his father died. That same year he received a scholarship for higher studies in America from the Maharaja. In July 1913, Dr. Ambedkar joined Columbia University, New York where he studied Economics, Sociology, Philosophy, Anthropology, History and Political Science. In 1916 he graduated with **M.A. and Ph.D.** degrees. From America, he went to London and joined the London School of Economics and Political Science for the degrees of **M. Sc. and D.Sc**. (Economics) as well as Gray's Inn for **Barrister-at-Law**. However, after one year, he had to suspend his studies as the duration of his scholarship was over. Upon his return to Baroda state in August 1917, he was appointed **Military Secretary** to the Maharaja, whose intention was to promote him to Finance Minister after some experience.

At work, he was still subjected to the same inhuman treatment by the caste-ridden society and **treated like the plague** despite his official status and qualifications. Even the peons, fearful of pollution, threw files and papers on to his desk from a distance and the carpet had to be rolled back lest the higher castes stood on the same material as he stood on. No one in Baroda was willing to rent him a room to stay but he managed to rent one in the local Parsi boarding house under

an assumed name. When the Parsis discovered his identity, they besieged his house and threatened to beat him. Eventually, the owner expelled him and he had to leave Baroda in disgust as he could not find any accommodation despite his complaints to the Maharaja.

Returning to Bombay in November 1917, he did odd jobs for a year before getting an appointment as Professor of Political Economy in the Sydenham College. Even in this institution of higher learning, the caste-based mentality still prevailed and he was **treated as a pariah** by the caste-Hindu professors and forbidden to drink water from the pot kept in the staff common room. As he was keen to complete his unfinished studies in London, he saved some money and with some financial assistance from the Maharaja of Kolhapur, proceeded to London to continue his studies on his own. In September 1920, he rejoined the London School of Economics and also Gray's Inn for Law. In June 1921, he obtained the **M. Sc. (Economics)** and in October 1922, he qualified as **Barrister-at-Law** at Gray's Inn. At the same time, he submitted his Doctorate thesis to the London School of Economics and went to Germany for further studies in Economics at the University of Bonn. Four months later, he was awarded **D. Sc. (Economics)** by the University of London.

9.2 The Fight against Untouchability

Returning to India in April 1923, Dr. Ambedkar started his own legal practice in Bombay but even among the legal profession, the prejudices against Untouchables still prevailed and according to Dr. Ambedkar: "*The solicitors would not condescend to have any business dealings with him on account of untouchability*." He was now 32 years old and easily the **most qualified man** in the country. The constant humiliations he suffered as an Untouchable convinced him that nothing would change unless the Untouchables themselves were awakened from their disabilities. Accordingly in July 1924 he founded the **Depressed Classes Welfare Association** *(Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha*), with the aim of promoting education and culture, improving their economic condition, and providing a voice for the grievances of Untouchables and low caste persons. Their motto was:

"**Educate, Agitate and Organise**" and in order to reach the masses, he started a Marathi weekly paper "*Bahishkit Bharat*". In 1926, he also founded a militant organisation called "*Samta Sanik Dal*" or **Social Equality Army**. Between 1927 and 1932, Ambedkar led his followers in a series of non-violent campaigns or **Satyagraha** to assert the right of Untouchables to enter Hindu places of worship and to drink water from public tanks and wells, denied from them by caste-Hindus for centuries. The most notable were the campaigns against the exclusion of Untouchables from the **Kalaram Temple** in Nashik and from the **Chowdar Tank** in Mahad. Both of these involved tens of thousands of Untouchables. Higher caste Hindus responded by beating them up. The Chowdar Tank campaign, after years of litigation, ended in a legal victory for the low caste activists. The Chowdar Tank campaign also saw the **ceremonial burning** of the *Manu Smriti* or 'Institutes of Manu', the ancient Hindu law book that Ambedkar viewed as the symbol of injustice against Untouchables by preaching inequality and directing caste-Hindus to punish any low-caste Hindu who dares to hear or read the Vedas.

Dr. Ambedkar's ardent and relentless pursuit of justice on behalf of the depressed and suppressed attracted the attention of the Governor of Bombay who nominated him to the **Bombay Legislative Council** in 1927. Thus began the parliamentary career of the man, who two decades later would become **Minister of Law** and **Chief Architect** of the Constitution when India became independent in 1947. In fact, he was instrumental in legally abolishing the curse of Untouchability and incorporating safeguards for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. He was also chiefly responsible for the adoption of Buddhist symbols as National symbols of India, namely: **Wheel of Law** in the Indian flag and **Sarnath Lion Capital** in the Indian currency note.

9.3 Babasaheb's Clash with Gandhi

In the course of his mission to secure greater political rights of the Untouchables, Dr. Ambedkar clashed with Gandhi, who denied the independent political rights of Untouchables by deliberately trying to keep them in the fold of Hinduism. At the first **Round Table**

Conference held in 12 Nov 1930, Dr. Ambedkar demanded separate political rights for the Untouchables from the Colonial Government. Impressed by his arguments, the Conference decided in principle to treat the Untouchables as a separate unit and give them special representation in the future set-up of India. But the matter could not be finalized as the Congress Party led by Gandhi had not participated in the first session of the R.T.C. Gandhi participated in the second session of the R.T.C. on 15 Sep 1931 and opposed the special treatment of the Untouchables although he had no objection for special treatment to Muslims and Sikhs. However, all efforts of Gandhi failed because the British Prime Minister Mr. Ramsay MacDonald granted separate electorate to the Untouchables in the Communal Award published by him in August 1932. Having failed across the Table, Gandhi resorted to his **favorite weapon**, i.e., **'fast unto death'** in order to have the Award suitably amended. The Communal Award had therefore to be modified and replaced by the Poona Pact on 25 Sep 1932, which Dr. Ambedkar had no choice but to sign in order to **save the life of Gandhi**. Under the Poona Pact, a joint electorate with 'reservation of seats' for the Depressed Classes replaced the separate electorate for the Untouchables. Thus although Gandhi outwardly showed his commitment to the Untouchables, his real purpose appeared to have been political. He wanted to ensure **numerical power** to Hindus (i.e. high-caste Hindus) vis-à-vis Muslims because in terms of numbers, the Depressed Classes constitute a quarter of India's population.

In the Preface of his book "**What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables**", Dr. Ambedkar tells us what really transpired at the Round Table Conference: "*Gandhi claimed to be the sole champion of the Untouchables and was not even prepared to share the honour with anyone else. I remember what a scene he created when his claim was contested. Mr. Gandhi does not merely claim for himself the championship of the Untouchables. He claims similar championship for the Congress. The Congress, he says, is fully pledged to redress the wrongs done to the Untouchables and argues that any attempt to give political safeguards to the Untouchables is unnecessary and harmful. It is therefore a great pity that no detailed study of these claims by Mr. Gandhi and the Congress has been undertaken so far.*"

9.4 Babasaheb's Spiritual Quest

Dr. Ambedkar's experience with the orthodox Hindus including Gandhi convinced him that they were not willing to to change the caste doctrines, as demonstrated by **Gandhi's opposition** to separate electorates for the Untouchables and their **continued exclusion from some Hindu temples**. So he started exhorting his followers to concentrate on raising their living standards and gaining political power. The failure of the Kalaram Temple Entry campaign to bend the caste-Hindus convinced him that there was no future for Untouchables by remaining in Hinduism and he seriously began to consider changing his religion. At a mammoth gathering on 13 October 1935 at **Yeola,** he recounted the **sorrowful plight** of Untouchables under the aegis of Hinduism and advised his followers to decide if it was not better for them to discard Hinduism and embrace some other faith that would give them **equal status**, **secure position and just treatment**. Speaking about himself, he said: "Unfortunately, I was born a Hindu. It was beyond my power to prevent that, but I solemnly assure you that **I will not die a Hindu**."

When Dr. Ambedkar announced his intention to discard the Hindu faith, there were **tempting offers** by Christians, Muslims and Sikhs to attract him to their religions. But he scoffed at these offers and rejected them without hesitation. On 30-31 May 1936 at Dadar in Mumbai, he delivered a speech entitled "**What way Liberty**?" In this historic speech, he detailed the path leading towards liberty and gave a call to conversion. He did not say which religion he was going to embrace. However, at the end of this speech, he exhorted the vast audience to remember the **last words of Buddha** to Ananda in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, "*Be ye an island unto yourselves, a refuge unto yourselves, seeking no external refuge; with the Teaching as your island, the Teaching as your refuge, seeking no other refuge*." This gave an indication of the direction he was taking.

After studying the various religions, Dr. Ambedkar concluded that **Buddhism** was the religion that could ensure the **dignity** of his downtrodden people. He realized that in order to develop an awakened society, a **change of mindset** among his people was necessary in tandem with the social and political battle for equal

rights for them. This mental revolution he found in the act of conversion from the **subservience** of an Untouchable in Hinduism to the **independence** of a **Buddhist** identity and complete development as a human being. Special emphasis was laid on the Buddha's teachings on **social equality**, particularly his **rejection of the caste system** and the Buddhist teaching that the **'true Brahman'** is one who engages in ethical behavior, regardless of birth, as expounded in the **Discourse on the Outcaste** (*Vasala Sutta*, *Suttanipata* 1.7)

At an open air ceremony on a 14-acre plot of vacant Government land now called **Diksha Bhumi** in **Nagpur,** Maharashtra on 14th October 1956, Dr. Ambedkar received **Diksha or Initiation** as a Buddhist lay disciple from **Venerable Sayadaw U Chandramani** of Kushinagar. He then called upon those in the mammoth gathering to stand up who wished to embrace Buddhism. The entire crowd of over **380,000** rose as one man and repeated the Three Refuges and Five Precepts after Babasaheb, enacting the **single biggest religious conversion** in world history. An important part of the ceremony was **22 vows** to all new converts after taking the Three Refuges and Five Precepts. As many people arrived after the ceremony, a second ceremony was performed the next day bringing the total number of converts to **half million**. On 16th October 1956 he repeated another mass conversion ceremony at Chanda involving **300,000** followers where he gave only 22 vows to the gathering.

9.5 Twenty-Two Vows Administered to Buddhist Converts

The first eight vows require the new convert to stop worshipping all the Hindu deities, stop regarding the Buddha as a reincarnation of Vishnu, stop performing Hindu funeral rites and stop employing Brahmins for ceremonies. The next two vows stress on equality of all men. Vows 11-18 require the convert to practise the Noble Eightfold Path, develop the ten Paramis, compassion and loving kindness, and keep the Five Precepts. The last four vows reaffirm their **anti-Hindu** and **pro-Buddhist** stances. These 22 vows are:

1. I shall have no faith in Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh nor shall I worship them.
2. I shall have no faith in Rama and Krishna who are believed to be incarnation of God nor shall I worship them.
3. I shall have no faith in ‘Gauri’, Ganapati and other gods and goddesses of Hindus nor shall I worship them.
4. I do not believe in the incarnation of God.
5. I do not and shall not believe that Lord Buddha was the incarnation of Vishnu. I believe this to be sheer madness and false propaganda.
6. I shall not perform ‘Shraddha’ nor shall I give ‘pind-dan’.
7. I shall not act in a manner violating the principles and teachings of the Buddha.
8. I shall not allow any ceremonies to be performed by Brahmins.
9. I shall believe in the equality of man.
10. I shall endeavor to establish equality.
11. I shall follow the ‘noble eightfold path’ of the Buddha.
12. I shall follow the ten ‘paramitas’ prescribed by the Buddha.
13. I shall have compassion and loving kindness for all living beings and protect them.
14. I shall not steal.
15. I shall not tell lies.
16. I shall not commit carnal sins.
17. I shall not take intoxicants like liquor, drugs etc.
18. I shall endeavor to follow the noble eightfold path and practice compassion and loving kindness in every day life.
19. I renounce Hinduism, which is harmful for humanity and impedes the advancement and development of humanity because it is based on inequality, and adopt Buddhism as my religion.
20. I firmly believe the Dhamma of the Buddha is the only true religion.
21. I believe that I am having a re-birth.
22. I solemnly declare and affirm that I shall hereafter lead my life according to the principles and teachings of the Buddha and his Dhamma.

9.6 Myth of the Caste System Shattered by Babasaheb

Although the Indian constitution makes caste discrimination illegal, the caste system or *Chaturvarnya* is still recognized and practised by the majority of Hindus. According to **Dr**. **Babasaheb Ambedkar**, the social order prescribed by the caste system is criminal in intent and anti-social in its results by perpetuating an illegal gain obtained by one class and an unjust wrong inflicted on another. This infamous charter has its origin in the 90th Hymn of the 10th Mandala of the **Rig Veda** known as "**Purusha Sukta**", a Hindu theory of the Origin of the Universe, which states that when the gods divided the primeval being Purusha to form the human society, "the **Brahmana** (priest) was his mouth, the **Kshatriya** (soldier) was made his arms; the being called the **Vaishya** (trader), he was his thighs; the **Shudra** (menial) sprang from his feet."

According to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Purusha Sukta concerns itself with the origin of the classes by saying that they were created by God – a doctrine that **no theology has thought fit to propound**! What is more astonishing is the plan of equating different classes to different parts of the body of the Creator. It is a deliberate plan to solve two problems, one of fixing function and the other of fixing hierarchy. The **Brahmin is equated to the mouth** of the Creator. Mouth being the noblest part of the anatomy, the Brahmin becomes the noblest of the four classes. As he is noblest in the scale, he is given the noblest function, that of custodian of knowledge and learning. The **Kshatriya is equated to the arms** of the Creator. Among the limbs, arms are next below the mouth. So Kshatriya is given an order of precedence next below the Brahmin and is given a function, which is second only to knowledge, namely, fighting. The **Vaishya is equated to the thighs**, which are next below the arms in the gradation of limbs. Consequently, the Vaishya is given an order of precedence next below the Kshatriya and is assigned a function of trade and industry, which ranked in ancient times next below the warrior. The **Shudra is equated to the feet** of the Creator. The feet form the lowest and most ignoble part of the human frame. So the Shudra is placed last in the social order and is given the filthiest function, namely to serve as a menial.

In his book "**Who were the Shudras**", Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar revealed that the Purusha Sukta **contradicts** the Creation theories expounded in many other chapters of the **Rig Veda**, where no reference at all is made to the separation of humans into the classes described. From the texts, it is beyond question that the **Rishis** who were the authors of the hymns of the Rig Veda regarded **Manu** as the progenitor of the Indo-Aryans, who formed **five tribes and not four classes**! There is no doubt that Purusha Sukta was **fabricated by Brahmins** with the objective of perpetuating the caste system by giving it a religious sanction to favour Brahmins at the expense of the other classes, in particular the Shudras, who form half of the Hindu population.

The social order prescribed by Purushka Sukta has never been questioned by anyone except the Buddha. Although the Buddha succeeded in annihilating caste within the **Monastic Order** as well as among the **Buddhist laity**, he was unable to effect a change in the Indian society because the caste system is so **firmly entrenched** in the Hindu mentality that it has never run short of protagonists. Even Gandhi defended the caste system by writing the following in the **Gujarati journal Nava-Jivan** in 1921-22:

- "*I believe that caste has saved Hinduism from disintegration.*"
- "*To destroy the caste system and adopt the Western European social system means that Hindus must give up the principle of hereditary occupation, which is the soul of the caste system. The hereditary principle is an eternal principle. To change it is to create disorder.*"
- "*The caste system is a natural order of society. In India it has been given a religious coating. Other countries not having understood the utility of the caste system, it existed only in a loose condition and consequently those countries have not derived from caste system the same degree of advantage that India has derived. These being my views I am opposed to all those who are out to destroy the caste system.*"

In contrast**, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar,** Champion of Untouchables had this to say about the caste system: "*There will be outcastes as long as there are castes, and nothing can emancipate the outcaste except **the destruction of the caste system**.*"

9.7 Atrocities against the Untouchables (Dalits)

In the Hindu caste system, a **Dalit**, formerly called **Untouchable**, is a person outside the four castes (*achuta* or outcaste) and considered below them. Untouchability is completely different from Impurity. Defilement as observed by primitive society was of a temporary duration such as in times of childbirth, death, menstruation, etc. After the period of defilement was over and purification ceremonies performed, the person becomes cleansed and associable. But there is nothing that can make the Untouchables pure. They are born impure, they are impure while they live, they die the death of the impure, and they give birth to children who are born with the stigma of Untouchabilty affixed to them. It is a case of permanent, **hereditary stain** that nothing can cleanse.

According to **Raja Sekhar Vundru** (The Pioneer, Dalit Millennium Issue, 30 Jan. 2000), "When Vasco da Gama landed in India in 1498, he witnessed a living hell for the Dalits. **Dalits feeding on carcasses**, lurking like animals in the day with a status worse than an animal and conditions of life worse than the millions of genocide victims of Adolf Hitler. The greatness of Dalits lies in their ability to survive in the ultra sub-human existence in Indian society and breed dasyus, menials, slave, asuras, chandalas and untouchables: **unparalleled and unrecorded in the history of world civilizations**."

The tyranny against untouchables was horrific! They were barred from acquiring education and knowledge, property and even wearing shirts. Even their shadows would pollute the high caste. They would be punished according to the inhuman laws of **Manusmriti** invented by Brahmins to suppress the lower castes: "*If a shudra recites Vedic texts, his tongue shall be cut out. If he is insolent enough to give lessons regarding the duty of the Brahmins, the king shall order hot oil to be poured into his mouth and ears. With whatever limb a man of low caste offends against a Brahmin, that very limb of him shall be cut off; such shall be the atonement of his crime.*"

Although Untouchability has been abolished in India, **atrocities** against Untouchables continue and in extremely traditional villages, Dalits are still forbidden to let their shadows fall upon Brahmins for

fear of ritually contaminating them; and they are still required to sweep the ground where they walk to remove the "**contamination**" of their footfalls. In some of these villages, rural Dalits are forbidden to worship in temples or draw water from the same wells as caste-Hindus, and they usually live in **segregated** neighborhoods outside the main village.

In view of the fact that Dalits are considered as **outcastes** in by fellow Hindus and **forbidden** to enter Hindu places of worship, questions have been raised as to **whether they are in fact Hindus**?

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, the **Greatest Leader** of the Untouchables of India coined the term '**Dalit**'. In the **Marathi** language it means *"crushed", "stepped on"* or *"oppressed"*, and effectively describes the real situation of the Untouchables. **Harijan** was the name coined by Gandhi which means "Children of God" (Hari is another name for the Hindu deity Vishnu), a form of **lip service** but many Dalits consider this term **condescending** (If they are children of God, why are they considered as outcastes by fellow Hindus?). Today people rarely use this term because it **sounds so hollow**!

9.8 Babasaheb Traces the Origin of Untouchability

In his book "**The Untouchables – Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables**?" published by the Education Department of the Government of Maharashtra, India, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar traced the origin of the Untouchables to "**Broken-men**" or displaced tribes-men whose tribes were defeated and broken up by others in primitive times when inter-tribal wars were common. In the course of wandering, the **Broken-men** found shelter outside settled villages where they undertook the duty of watch and ward in return for food and shelter. As tribal organization was based primarily on **blood and kinship**, the **Broken-men** were treated as aliens and were not permitted to live in the midst of the settled tribe. From the strategic point of view, it was desirable that they should live on the border of the settlement to meet the raids of hostile tribes. Both considerations dictate placing their **quarters outside the village**.

With the arrival of the **Aryans around 1500 BC**, further segregation was established through the caste system, with the locals integrated as **Shudras** (labourers). The Brahmins could only penetrate into the tribe and exercise their **control through religion**. If they had attempted to integrate the Broken-men into the tribes, it would have created conflicts between themselves and the Aryanised tribes, which did not admit the Broken-men within their ranks. So the Brahmins had no choice but to leave the Broken-men in their original condition. Later, when the Brahmins as a religious group reoriented their techniques of social control, this attitude became stiff and exclusive, so that the Broken-men who remained outside the pale of caste system came to be labelled as **Untouchables**. The attitude became one of downright **hostility** when the Broken-men entered the fold of Buddhism, the tenets of which went against the caste system.

According to Dr. Ambedkar, there is **no racial difference** between the Hindus and Untouchables. Before the advent of Untouchability, the distinction was between **Tribesmen and Broken-men**. It is the Broken-men who came to be treated as Untouchables. There are **two roots** from which Untouchability arose: (a) contempt and hatred by Brahmins of Broken-men, especially those who embraced Buddhism (b) continuation of **beef-eating** by Broken-men after it had been given up by the Brahmins, who became staunch vegetarians in order to regain their lost prestige to Buddhists who practiced non-killing. Previously Brahmins ate beef and practised **sacrificial killing** of horses and cattle. The Book of Kindred Sayings (*Samyutta Nikaya*) Part I, Chapter III-9 mentions a great sacrifice arranged for King Pasenadi in which 500 bulls, 500 bullocks and as many heifers, goats and rams, were led to the pillars by weeping slaves and workers, who were forced to make the preparations for the sacrifice.

Dr. Ambedkar believed the period from 500 B.C. to 500 A.D. to be most momentous period in history of India. It was during this period that Buddhism was founded and spread rapidly among the people eroding the supremacy of the Brahmins. He interprets the murder of last Maurya king by Pushyamitra Shunga in 2nd century B.C. as the beginning of **Brahmanic counter-revolution** against Buddhism, leading to the branding of Broken-men and **Buddhists as Untouchables** during the **Gupta Period** around 400AD.

9.9 Branding Buddhists as Outcastes by the Brahmins

The branding of Buddhists as outcastes began even during the Buddha's time. **Discourse on Outcaste** (*Vasala Sutta*, *Suttanipata* 1.7) describes an incident while the Buddha was going on alms-round in Savatthi. The Brahmin Aggikabharadvaja while attending to the sacrificial fire saw the Blessed One coming from afar off and shouted at him: "Stop there, shaveling; stop there, wretched monk; stop there, **miserable outcaste**." In response to this abuse, the Buddha answered: "Do you know O Brahmin, who an outcaste is, or the things that make an outcaste?" The calm reply surprised the Brahmin. He stopped the abuse and wanting to know the answer, asked the Buddha to explain **who an outcaste is and what makes an outcaste**. So the Buddha preached the *Vasala Sutta* that defined an outcaste by his ethical behavior, irrespective of birth, namely:

"*By birth one is not an outcaste, by birth one is not a Brahmana. By deeds one is an outcaste, by deeds one is a Brahmana.*"

From this incident, it may be inferred that the Brahmins in general **disliked** Buddhist monks (including the Buddha who belonged to the warrior caste, which was the most respected caste during his time) and treated Brahmins with disrespect because Buddhism **preached against the caste system** that favored the Brahmins while the Buddhist laity did not respect Brahmins, did not employ them as their priests and regarded them as impure. In fact, this particular incident lends credence to the theory of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar that the **contempt and hatred** of Buddhist by the Brahmins was the root cause of Untouchability.

9.10 Why Dalits Convert to Buddhism

On 12 May 1956 **Dr. Ambedkar** spoke on the BBC explaining why he chose Buddhism out of the prevalent religions of the world. According to him, Buddhism offers three principles in combination that no other religion does. All the other religions are concerned with 'God' and 'Life after Death or Soul'. Buddhism teaches *panna*

(understanding against superstition and supernaturalism), *karuna* (love between people against a slave and master relationshoip) and *samata* (equality against the caste system). This is what man wants for a good and happy life on earth. Neither God nor the Soul can do that. These three principles of Buddhism appealed to him and should also appeal to the world.

Thanks to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, the Dalits have returned to the religion of their forefathers who were Buddhists in the past and were condemned as Untouchables during the Gupta Period around 400 AD. To illustrate the sheer influence of Dr. Ambedkar in shaping the **Revival of Buddhism** in India, from the time Anagarika Dharmapala launched the Movement in 1891 to 1951 (60 years), the number of Buddhists in India increased marginally from 50,000 to **180,823**. After Dr. Ambedkar led his followers into the fold of Buddhism just 50 years ago in Nagpur, the Buddhist population in India has increased to about **50 million** today. Thus the **credit** for making Buddhism once again a living religion in India goes to Dr. Ambedkar. **(**According to an internet article on the "Resurgence of Buddhism in India" by **Cyrus Shaoul**, the Japanese writer **Motoo Yamagiwa**, an authority on Indian Buddhism estimates the Buddhist population of India in 1996 at over **50 million people**.)

9.11 Greet Followers of Dr. Ambedkar with "Jhai Bhim"

Nowadays it is quite common to meet many Indian Buddhists from Maharashtra (state in India that has the most number of Buddhists), performing the pilgrimage at the various Holy Places. If you happen to meet such groups, just greet them by raising your hand and cheer loudly: "*Jhai Bhim* (Long live Bhim)". This will surely warm their hearts, because to them, Bhim (as Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar is fondly remembered) restored their dignity by **debunking the caste system** and blazing the way for them to **return to the fold of Buddhism**, the religion of their forefathers. In return you will receive an enthusiastic response of "*Jhai Bhim*" from many happy faces that will add joy to your pilgrimage too.

10. Notes to Part I

Note 1, page 10, Small Vehicle: One hundred years after the Buddha's *Parinibbana*, during the reign of the Nanda king Kalasoka (reigned 396-360 BC), the Second Buddhist Council was held at Vesali to discuss ten points or practices of the Vajjian monks, which were ruled to be unlawful by the Council. In 349 BC about forty years after the Second Council, another event happened that would polarize the *Sangha*. According to the tradition of the Sammitiya School recorded by Bhavya, a monk named Bhadra (or Mahadeva) proposed Five Heresies questioning the nature of the Arahant. A great assembly of ten thousand, consisting of monks and laity called '*Mahasangiti*' was convened in Pataliputta with the support of the king and the majority voted in favour of these heretical views. This resulted in a schism of the *Sangha* and the secession of the *Mahasanghika*, believed to be the forerunners of the *Mahayana*. From then on further schisms led to the formation of different sub-sects until **Eighteen Schools of Buddhism** arose.

Later on, the followers of *Mahayana* tradition, which developed sometime immediately prior to the Christian era in Andra Pradesh coined the term '*Hinayana*' to describe these early schools. The name reflected the *Mahayanist* evaluation of their own tradition as a new superior method and was aimed at disparaging the accomplishments of the earlier schools of Buddhism. This name, however, was not accepted by the conservative schools, which considered it as degrading because the term '*Hinayana*' actually denotes 'mean or degraded vehicle' and not Small Vehicle (*Cullayana)*. The modern upholders of the ancient Buddhist tradition are the *Theravadins* (followers of the Way of the Elders), who are but one of the 18 ancient schools or *Nikayas*. Due to its derogatory nature, the term '*Hinayana*' should be avoided when referring to the ***Nikayas*** or Early Schools of Buddhism.

Note 2, page 11: Ts'ung-ling or Onion Mountain is the ancient Chinese designation for the great snowy range, which connects the T'ien-shan in the north with the K'un-lun and Hindukush in the south, and forms the mighty eastern rim of the Pamirs. The Chinese called the Pamirs, Onion Mountains, because they thought it was the local onions that made them sick. Actually it was the altitude that caused the sickness.

Note 3, page 11, Buddha Shadow: According to a popular legend among the Chinese pilgrims, the Buddha left his shadow in a cave on the

mountainside in Nagarahara (old capital of the Jalalabad district). This cavern was the abode of a destructive dragon, Naga Gopala, who was planning to destroy the kingdom for a slight offence against him when he was a shepherd in a former life. Out of compassion for the inhabitants, the Buddha came to Nagarahara from mid India and after taming the dragon, left his shadow on the wall of the Naga Gopala cave. The Buddha advised the dragon to look at his shadow whenever evil intentions arose in his mind and by its power of love and virtue, the evil purpose would be stopped. In later days, the shadow was not visible anymore.

Note 4, page 11, Alms Bowl Relic: According to Fa Hsien, it was at a place 12 *yojanas* southeast of Kusinara that Lord Buddha had donated his alms-bowl to the Licchavis. Earlier at Vaishali, he had announced his impending death or *Parinibbana.* The Licchavis having become overwhelmed with emotions at this news kept following him and did not want to leave him. Lord Buddha then created the illusion of a large and deeply scarped river separating them and donating his alms-bowl to the Licchavis, he exhorted them to return to their homes. To commemorate this event the Licchavis erected a pillar at Vesali.

Kesariya, 55 kilometres northwest of Vesali, is believed to be present day location of that event (see Part IV of this book). Fa Hsien says nothing about how the alms-bowl ended up in Gandhara. But the Tibetan historian Taranatha observes that: "the king of the Yueh-chih (Kushan) invaded Magadha and carried off the bowl of Buddha and Asvaghosa." Cunningham is of the opinion that it was either the Kushana king Kanishka (ruled 78-102 AD) or his successor Huvishka. As there is no evidence that Huvishka ever invaded Magadha, it was probably Kanishka who took the alms bowl to Peshawar around the 1st century AD. While in Varanasi, the philosopher Asvaghosa saw the city conquered by the Kushana emperor Kanishka. A huge war indemnity was demanded and to appease the Buddhist conqueror, the ruler of Varanasi handed over the alms bowl of the Buddha as a symbolic gesture. Asvaghosa probably accompanied Kanishka back to Peshawar to serve as spiritual counsellor in his court. For an account of the whereabouts of the alms bowl after that, please refer to article 'The Journey of the Buddha's Alms Bowl" on page 153.

Note 5, page 25,: The **Hephthalites**, also called White Huns because of their white bodies, were a group of nomadic tribesmen who originally lived in the Altai mountain region of Mongolia and are known as Huna in Indian records and Ye-tha in Chinese records. According to Western records

written in the 6th century, the Hephthalites were of Hunnish stock but they did not mingle with other Hun tribes. They were different from the Huns led by Attila who invaded the Roman Empire. In the 5th century AD, they began their westward expansion and by the year 500 AD, the Hephthalites controlled an area stretching south from Samarkand to the Arabian Sea, and as far west as Khurasan (Iran) and all of northern India to the east.

After the death of Gupta ruler Skandagupta (455-470 AD), the Hephthalites entered India from the Kabul valley which they had wrested control from the Kushans earlier. They plundered every town and village along the Ganges and eventually conquered the capital Pataliputta. They persecuted Buddhists and burned all the monasteries. Their conquest was accomplished with extreme ferocity and according to the Chinese pilgrim Sung Yun, the disposition of this king (Mihirakula?) was cruel and vindictive and he practised the most barbarous atrocities. For thirty years the Hephthalite kings ruled over northwestern India. According to Hsuan Tsang, the inhuman cruelties perpetrated by the Hun king Mihirakula were checked by Baladitya of Magadha, but there was no one to stop his barbaric acts of destroying *stupas* and monasteries and even exterminating the Buddhist laity in Kashmir until his complete defeat by Yasodharman. The Huna rule beginning with Toramana did not end with the defeat of his son Mihirakula. Their hold on Kashmir lasted longer. Mihirakula's son Baka is said to have atoned for the guilt of his father by erecting many monasteries and *stupas* for the Buddhists in Kashmir.

Eventually the Huns, like the earlier invaders such as Sakas, Kushans and Gurjaras settled in Rajputana (Rajasthan) where they became known as 'Rajputs' after the Brahmins elevated their status to 'kshatriyas'. One version of their origin is that four warriors, Agnikul, Yadaukul, Suryakul and Odak, whose names the Rajput clans took, sprang from the sacred fire in a ceremony performed by the sage Vashishtha at Mount Abu. Henceforth they became known as 'Agnikula kshatriyas' or fire-born warriors. Dr. Ambedkar is of the view that the objective was to use them as a means to intimidate the Buddhists and suppress Buddhism in India. (Ref. 46: Decline and Fall of Buddhism by Dr. K. Jamanadas Chapter 8)

Note 6, page 28, Turuskas or **Khaliji Turks**: The first wave of invasion of India was by the Turks under **Mahmud of Ghazni** of the Ghaznavid dynasty (977-1186), which defeated the Indian forces in 991 AD. Peshawar and Kurram valley came under Muslim domination. During the second half of the 12th century, the Ghaznavid Empire fell to the Ghurs of Persia and Afghanistan came under the rule of **Mohammad Ghori**. Mohammad Ghori

is said to have invaded India seven times beginning from 1175 AD. From 1192 to 1194 he conquered Delhi, Kannauj and Benares. He appointed **Qutabuddin Aibek**, a former slave from Turkistan to be in charge of Indian affairs. Aibek's general, **Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khaliji**, successfully plundered and conquered the fort of Bihar in 1193 and in 1199-1202, Bengal came under his authority. Emboldened by these easy victories, four years later he led an expedition to conquer Tibet. After suffering heavy losses at Assam and retreating back to Bengal he fell seriously ill. When he was hovering between life and death, Ali Mardan Khalji, his appointed governor stabbed him to death. A native of Garamsir (Dasht-i-Marg) in northern Afghanistan, Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khaliji belonged to the Khaliji tribe. The Khalijis were of Turkish origin but had settled in Khalj, the land lying on either side of the **Helmand River in Afghanistan** for so long that they had become different from the Turks in terms of customs and manners. In Indian records, they are known as 'Turuskas'.

Note 7, page 29, **Hindu Opposition**: To counter the threat posed by the popularity of Buddhism and maintain their dominant position in the *Chatur-varna* or caste system, the Brahmins had come out with several *puranas* (mythology) sometime during the 8th century AD declaring the Buddha to be the ninth *avatara* (reincarnation) of Vishnu as a verse to this effect from 'Matsya Purana' is engraved in a monument at Mahabalipuram near Madras. The process was complete by the time of the Bengali poet Jayadeva's writing of his 'Gita Govind' and including Buddha's name in it as an '*Avatara*' in the 12th century AD. According to *Puranic* tradition in the Mahabharata, the **ninth *avatar* is Balarama not Buddha**. It was a ploy by the Brahmins to **subvert the religion** by creating confusion in the minds of the people and portray Buddhism as a branch of Brahmanism. Their objective was to win over the hearts of the people to Brahmanism and perpetuate the caste system. However the caste system is so unjust to lower caste Hindus that millions of Dalits or 'Untouchables' have converted to Buddhism making them the largest group of Buddhists in India today.

Note 8, page 29: The extermination of Buddhism in India was hastened by the large-scale vandalization and appropriation of Buddhist temples by the Hindus. In 1590 AD, the Mahabodhi Temple in Buddhagaya was taken over by a Hindu Mahant Gosain Giri, who converted it into a Shaivite temple. His successors kept expanding the Math by illegally occupying all the land around the Mahabodhi Temple. Although Anagarika Dharmapala fought several legal battles for the return of the Temple to Buddhists, the Bihar Government favored the Hindus by enacting the Buddha Gaya Temple

Management Act in 1949, which effectively ensured that the Hindus remained in control. The Makutabandhana Stupa or cremation stupa in Kushinagar was changed into a Hindu temple dedicated to an obscure deity named Rambhar Bhavani when Cunningham discovered it in 1860. The locals still call it ‘Rambhar’ after the deity. Even today, pilgrims who visit the Ananda Stupa in Hajipur will see a dilapidated Hindu temple on top of it. The place is called Ramchaura Mandir after the temple.

Note 9, page 38: Court Hearing of Dispute over Ownership of King Mindon’s Kuthodaw Rest House in Bodhgaya

In 1908 Anagarika Dhammapala filed a suit at the local court to have the building returned to the Buddhist Community for the use intended by King Mindon but the Mahant submitted that King Mindon had given the deeds of the building to him and he was able to produce them in court. Dhammapala explained that King Mindon had donated the building to provide facilities to Buddhist monks and laity who would come to Buddhagaya on a pilgrimage. The Mahant was a not a Buddhist and he had nothing at all to do with the building. As the King only deposited the deeds with the Mahant for safekeeping as a temporary measure, he should therefore hand them back to the Buddhist Community. Both sides were able to produce evidence. Even after a year, the case was still undecided.

In order to obtain further evidence to strengthen his case, Anagarika Dhammapala decided to visit King Mindon's son King Thibaw, who was in exile in Ratanagiri, a coastal town 355 km south of Bombay. Accompanied by Sayadaw U Chandramani, his disciple U Sandawbatha and Kappiya Maung Pho Yin, the team left for Calcutta, and then went by train to Bombay where they stayed the night at the house of a friend. From there they informed the King's Palace about their visit and then proceeded on their journey by ship arriving at Ratanagiri at night. Next morning, they had an audience with the king. The meeting, however turn out to be futile because King Thibaw could not produce any documentary evidence to support their case. In the end, the Judge decided in favour of the Mahant simply because the deeds of the building happened to be in his hands. No matter what other reasons were produced by Dhammapala, they were not good enough. Dhammapala had lost. The losing of the court case meant that the highly valued Kuthodaw Rest House built by King Mindon for the benefit of Buddhist monks and pilgrims coming to Buddhagaya, was forever lost to the Mahant and his descendents who did not care about the Buddhists; the Pilgrim's Rest House henceforth became a grand dwelling place for the Hindu-Brahmins to this day.